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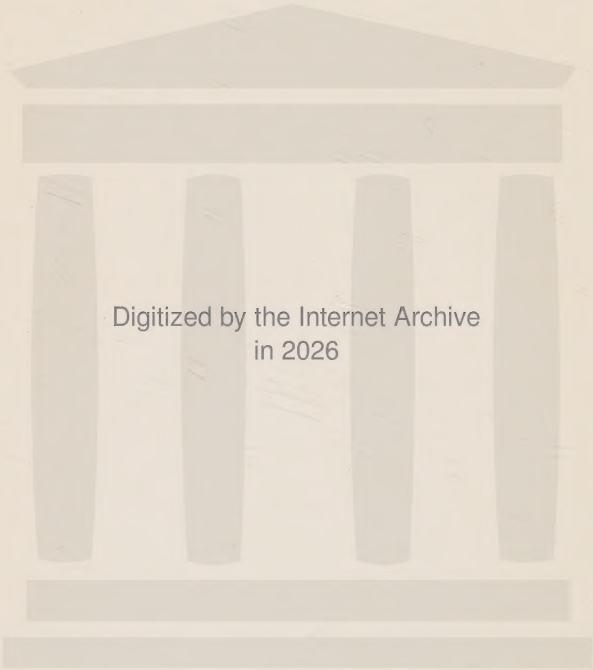
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CHRIST IN THE HEART

CHRIST IN THE HEART

AND OTHER SERMONS by

Alexander Maclaren D.D.

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STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT.

SERMON I.

STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT.

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man."—EPH. iii. 16.

IN no part of Paul's letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some majestic suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence-chamber, until at last we stand there.

Roughly speaking, the prayer is divided into four petitions, of which each is the cause of the following and the result of the preceding:—"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." That is the first. "In order that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," "ye being rooted and grounded in love"—such is the second, the result of the first, and the preparation for the third. "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints . . . and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." Such is the next, and all lead up at last to that wonderful desire beyond which nothing is possible—"that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

I venture to contemplate dealing with these four petitions in successive sermons, in order, God helping me, that I may bring before you a fairer vision of the possibilities of your Christian life than you ordinarily entertain. For Paul's prayer is God's purpose, and what He means with all who profess His name is that these exuberant desires may be fulfilled in them. So let us now listen to that petition which is the foundation of all, and consider that great thought of the Divine strength-giving power which may be bestowed upon every Christian soul.

I.—First, then, I remark that God means, and wishes, that all Christians should be strong by the possession of the spirit of might.

It is a miserably inadequate conception of Christianity, and of the gifts which it bestows, and the blessings which it intends for men, when it is limited, as it practically is, by a large number—I might almost say the majority—of professing Christians to a simple means of alte ing their relation to the past, and to the broken law of God and of righteousness. Thanks be to His name! His great gift to the world begins in each individual case with the assurance that all the past is cancelled. He gives that blessed sense of forgiveness, which can never be too highly estimated unless it is forced out of its true place as the introduction, and made to be the climax and the end of His gifts. I do not know what Christianity means, unless it means that you and I are forgiven for a purpose; that the purpose, if I may so say, is something in advance of the means towards the purpose, the purpose being that we should be filled with all the strength and righteousness and supernatural life granted to us by the Spirit of God.

It is well that we should enter into the vestibule. There is no other path to the Throne but through the vestibule. But do not let us forget that the good news of forgiveness, though we need it day by day, and perpetually repeated,

is but the introduction to, and porch of the Temple, and that beyond it there towers, if I cannot say a loftier, yet I may say a further gift, even the gift of a Divine life like His, from Whom it comes, and of which it is in reality an effluence and a spark. The true characteristic blessing of the Gospel is the gift of a new power to a sinful weak world; a power which makes the feeble strong, and the strongest as an angel of God.

Oh, brethren! we who know how, "if any power we have, it is to ill;" we who understand the weakness, the unaptness of our spirits to any good, and our strength for every vagrant evil that comes upon them to tempt them, should surely recognise as a Gospel in very deed that which proclaims to us that the "everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth," Who Himself "fainteth not, neither is weary," hath yet a loftier display of His strength-giving power than that which is visible in the heavens above, where, "because He is strong in might not one faileth." That heaven, the region of calm completeness, of law unbroken and therefore of power undiminished, affords a lesser and dimmer manifestation of His strength than the work that is done in the hell of a human heart that has wandered and is brought back, that is stricken with the weakness of the fever of sin, and is healed into the strength of obedience and the omnipotence of dependence. It is much to say "for that He is strong in might, not one of these faileth.' It is more to say "He giveth power to them that have failed; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." The Gospel is the gift of pardon for holiness, and its inmost and most characteristic bestowment is the bestowment of a new power for obedience and service.

And that power, as I need not remind you, is given to us through the gift of the Divine Spirit. The very name

of that Spirit is the "Spirit of Might." Christ spoke to us about being "endued with power from on high." The last of His promises that dropped from His lips upon earth was the promise that His followers should receive the power of the Spirit coming upon them. Wheresoever in the early histories we read of a man that was full of the Holy Ghost, we read that he was "full of power." According to the teaching of this Apostle. God hath given us the "spirit of power," which is also the spirit "of love and of a sound mind." So the strength that we must have, if we have strength at all, is the strength of a Divine Spirit, not our own, that dwells in us, and works through us.

And there is nothing in that which need startle or surprise any man who believes in a living God at all, and in the possibility, therefore, of a connection between the Great Spirit, and all the human spirits which are His children. I would maintain, in opposition to many modern conceptions, the actual supernatural character of the gift that is bestowed upon every Christian soul. My reading of the New Testament is that as distinctly above the order of material nature as is any miracle, is the gift that flows into a believing heart. There is a direct passage between God and my spirit. It lies open to His touch ; all the paths of its deep things can be trodden by Him. You and I act upon one another from without, He acts upon us within. We wish one another blessings ; He gives the blessings. We try to train, to educate, to incline, and dispose, by the presentation of motives and the urging of reasons ; He can plant in a heart by His own Divine husbandry the seed that shall blossom into immortal life. And so the Christian Church is a great, continuous, supernatural community in the midst of the material world ; and every believing soul, because it possesses something of the life of Jesus Christ, has been the seat of a miracle

as real and true as when He said "Lazarus, come forth!" Precisely this teaching does our Lord Himself present for our acceptance when He sets side by side, as mutually illustrative, as belonging to the same order of supernatural phenomena, "the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live," which is the supernatural resurrection of souls dead in sin,—and "the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth," which is the future resurrection of the body, in obedience to His will.

So, Christian men, and women, do you set clearly before you this: that God's purpose with you is but begun when He has forgiven you, that He forgives you for a design, that it is a means to an end, and that you have not reached the conception of the large things which He intends for you unless you have risen to this great thought —He means and wishes that you should be strong with the strength of His own Divine Spirit.

II.—Now notice, next, that this Divine Power has its seat in, and is intended to influence the whole of the inner life.

As my text puts it, we may be strengthened with might by His spirit *in the inner man*. By the "inner man" I suppose, is not meant the new creation through faith in Jesus Christ which this Apostle calls "the new man," but simply what Peter calls the "hidden man of the heart," the "soul," or unseen self as distinguished from the visible material body which it animates and informs. It is this inner self, then, in which the Spirit of God is to dwell, and into which it is to breathe strength. The leaven is hid deep in three measures of meal until the whole be leavened. And the point to mark is that the whole inward region which makes up the true man is the field upon which this Divine Spirit is to work. It is not

a bit of your inward life that is to be hallowed. It is not any one aspect of it that is to be strengthened, but it is the whole intellect, affections, desires, tastes, powers of attention, conscience, imagination, memory, will. The whole inner man in all its corners is to be filled, and to come under the influence of this power, "until there be no part dark, as when the bright shining of a candle giveth thee light."

There is no part of my being that is not patent to the tread of this Divine Guest. There are no rooms of the house of my spirit, into which He may not go. Let Him come with the master key in His hand into all the dim chambers of your feeble nature; and as the one life is light in the eye, and colour in the cheek, and deftness in the fingers, and strength in the arm, and pulsation in the heart, so He will come with the manifold results of the one gift to you. He will strengthen your understandings, and make you able for loftier tasks of intellect and of reason, than you can face in your unaided power; He will dwell in your affections and make them vigorous to lay hold upon the holy things that are above their natural inclination, and will make it certain that their reach shall not be beyond their grasp, as, alas! it so often is in the sadness, and disappointments of human love. He will come into that feeble, vacillating, wayward will of yours, that is only obstinate in its adherence to the low and the evil, as some foul creature, that one may try to wrench away, digs its claws into corruption and holds on by that. He will lift your will and make it fix upon the good and abominate the evil, and through the whole being He will pour a great tide of strength which shall cover all the weakness. He will be like some subtle elixir which, taken into the lips, steals through a pallid and wasted frame, and brings back a glow to the cheek and a lustre to the eye, and swiftness to the brain, and power to the

whole nature. Or as some plant, drooping and flagging beneath the hot rays of the sun, when it has the scent of water given to it, will, in all its parts, stiffen and erect itself, so when the Spirit is poured out on men, their whole nature is invigorated and helped.

That indwelling Spirit will be a power for suffering. The parallel passage to this in the twin Epistle to the Colossians is—"strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-suffering with gentleness." Ah! brethren, unless this Divine Spirit were a power for patience and endurance it were no power suited to us poor men. So dark at times is every life; so full at times of discouragements, of dreariness, of sadness, of loneliness, of bitter memories, and of fading hopes does the human heart become, that if we are to be strong we must have a strength that will manifest itself most chiefly in this, that it teaches us how to bear, how to weep, how to submit.

And it will be a power for conflict. We have all of us, in the discharge of duty and the meeting of temptation, to face such tremendous antagonisms that unless we have grace given to us which will enable us to resist, we shall be overcome and swept away. God's power from the Divine Spirit within us, does not absolve us from the fight but it fits us for the fight. It is not given in order that holiness may be won without a struggle, as some people seem to think, but it is given to us in order that in the struggle for holiness we may never lose "one jot of heart or hope," but may be "able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

It is a power for service. "Tarry ye in Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high." There is no such force for the spreading of Christ's Kingdom, and the witness-bearing work of His Church as the possession of this Divine Spirit. Plunged into that fiery baptism, the selfishness and the sloth, which stand in the way of so

many of us, are all consumed and annihilated, and we are set free for service because the bonds that bound us are burnt up in the merciful furnace of His fiery power.

"Ye shall be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man"—a power that will fill and flood all your nature if you will let it, and will make you strong to suffer, strong to combat, strong to serve, and to witness for your Lord.

III.—And now, lastly, let me point you still further to the measure of this power. It is limitless with the boundlessness of God Himself. "That he would grant you," is the daring petition of the Apostle, "according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened."

There is the measure. There is no limit except the uncounted wealth of His own self-manifestation, the flashing light of revealed Divinity. Whatsoever there is of splendour in that, whatsoever there is of power there, is these and in nothing on this side of them, lies the limit of the possibilities of a Christian life. Of course there is a working limit at each moment, and that is our capacity to receive; but that capacity varies, may vary indefinitely, may become greater and greater beyond our count or measurement. Our hearts may be more and more capable of God; and in the measure of which they are capable of Him they shall be filled by Him. A limit which is always shifting is no limit at all. A kingdom, the boundaries of which are not the same from one year to another, by reason of its own inherent expansive power, may be said to have no fixed limit. And so we appropriate and enclose, as it were, within our own little fence a tiny portion of the great prairie that rolls boundlessly to the horizon. But to-morrow we may enclose more, if we will, and more and more; and so ever onwards, for all that is God's is ours, and He has given us His whole self to use and to possess through our faith in His Son. A thimble can only take

up a thimbleful of the ocean, but what if the thimble be endowed with a power of expansion which has no term known to men? May it not, then, be that some time or other it shall be able to hold so much of the infinite depth as now seems a dream too audacious to be realised?

So it is with us and God. He lets us come into the vaults, as it were, where in piles and masses the ingots of uncoined and uncounted gold are stored and stacked; and He says, "Take as much as you like to carry." There is no limit except the riches of His glory.

And now, dear friends, remember that this great gift, offered to each of us, is offered on conditions. To you professing Christians especially I speak. You will never get it unless you want it, and some of you do not want it. There are plenty of people in this chapel at this moment who call themselves Christian men, that would not for the life of them know what to do with this great gift if they had it. You will get it if you desire it. "Ye have not because ye ask not."

Oh! when one contrasts the largeness of God's promises and the miserable contradiction to them which the average Christian life of this generation presents, what can we say? "Hath His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore?" Ye weak Christian people, born weakling and weak ever since, as so many of you are, open your mouths wide. Rise to the height of the expectations and the desires which it is our sin not to cherish; and be sure of this, as we ask so shall we receive. "Ye are not straitened in God." Alas! alas! "ye are straitened in yourselves."

And mind, there must be self-suppression if there is to be the triumph of a Divine power in you. You cannot fight with both classes of weapons. The human must die if the Divine is to live. The life of nature, dependence on self, must be weakened and subdued if the life of God

is to overcome and to fill you. You must be able to say "Not I!" or you will never be able to say "Christ liveth in me." The patriarch that overcame halted on his thigh; and all the life of nature was lamed and made impotent that the life of grace might prevail. So crush self by the power and for the sake of the Christ, if you would that the Spirit should bear rule over you.

See to it, too, that you use what you have of that Divine Spirit. "To him that hath shall be given." What is the use of more water being sent down the mill lade, if the water that does come to it all runs away at the bottom, and none of it goes over the wheel? Use the power you have, and power will come to the faithful steward of what he possesses. He that is faithful in a little shall get much to be faithful over. Ask and use, and the ancient thanksgiving may still come from our lips. "In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."

THE INDWELLING CHRIST.

SERMON II.

THE INDWELLING CHRIST.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; . ye being rooted and grounded in love."—EPH. iii. 17.

WE have here the second step of the great staircase by which Paul's fervent desires for his Ephesian friends climbed towards that wonderful summit, of his prayers—which is ever approached, never reached,—"that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Two remarks of an expository character, will prepare the way for the lessons of these verses. The first is as to the relation of this clause to the preceding. It might appear at first sight to be simply parallel with the former, expressing substantially the same ideas under a somewhat different aspect. The operation of the strength-giving Spirit in the inner man might very naturally be supposed to be equivalent to the dwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith. So many commentators do, in fact, take it; but I think that the two ideas may be distinguished, and that we are to see in the words of our text, as I have said, the second step in this prayer, which is in some sense a result of the "strengthening with might by the Spirit in the inner man." I need not enter in detail into the reasons for taking this view of the connection of the clause,

which is obviously in accordance with the climbing-up structure of the whole verse. It is enough to point it out as the basis of my further remarks.

And now the second observation with which I will trouble you, before I come to deal with the thoughts of the verse, is as to the connection of the last words of it. You may observe that in reading the words of my text I omitted the "that" which stands in the centre of the verse. I did so, because the words, "Ye being rooted and grounded in love," in the original, do stand before the "*that*," and are distinctly separated by it from the subsequent clause. They ought not therefore, to be shifted forward into it, as our translators and the Revised Version have, I think, unfortunately done, unless there were some absolute necessity either from meaning or from construction. I do not think that this is the case ; but on the contrary, if they are carried forward into the next clause, which describes the result of Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, they break the logical flow of the sentence by mixing together result and occasion. And so I attach them to the first part of this verse, and take them to express at once the consequence of Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith, and the preparation or occasion for our being able to comprehend and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Now that is all with which I need trouble you in the way of explanation of the meaning of the words. Let us come now to deal with their substance.

I.—Consider the Indwelling of Christ, as desired by the Apostle for all Christians.

To begin with, let me say in the plainest, simplest, strongest way that I can, that that dwelling of Christ in the believing heart is to be regarded as being a plain literal fact.

To a man who does not believe in the Divinity of Jesus

Christ, of course that is nonsense, but to those of us who do see in Him the manifested incarnate God, there ought to be no difficulty in accepting this as the simple literal force of the words before us, that in every soul where faith, howsoever feeble, has been exercised, there Jesus Christ does verily abide.

It is not to be weakened down into any notion of participation in His likeness, sympathy with His character, submission to His influence, following His example, listening to His instruction, or the like. A dead Plato may so influence his followers, but that is not how a living Christ influences His disciples. What is meant is no mere influence derived but separable from Him, however blessed and gracious that influence might be, but it is the presence of His own self, exercising influences which are inseparable from His presence, and only to be realised when He dwells in us.

I think that Christian people as a rule do far too little turn their attention to this aspect of the Gospel teaching, and concentrate their thoughts far too much upon that which is unspeakably precious in itself, but does not exhaust all that Christ is to us, viz., the work that He wrought for us upon Calvary; or to take a step further, the work that He is now carrying on for us as our Intercessor and Advocate in the Heavens. You who listen to me Sunday after Sunday will not suspect me of seeking to minimise either of these two aspects of our Lord's mission and operation, but I do believe that very largely the glad thought of an indwelling Christ Who actually abides and works in our hearts, and is not only for us in the Heavens, or with us by some kind of impalpable and metaphorical presence, but in simple, that is to say, in spiritual reality is in our spirits, has faded away from the consciousness of the Christian Church.

And so we are called "mystics" when we preach

Christ in the heart. Ah! brother, unless your Christianity be in the good deep sense of the word "mystical," it is mechanical, which is worse. I preach, and rejoice that I have to preach, a "Christ that died, yea! rather that is risen again; Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us." Nor do I stop there, but I preach a Christ that is in us, dwelling in our hearts if we be His at all.

Well, then, further observe that the special emphasis of the prayer here is that this "indwelling" may be an unbroken and permanent one. Any of you who can consult the original for yourselves will see that the Apostle here uses a compound word which conveys the idea of intensity and continuity. What he desires, then, is not merely that these Ephesian Christians may have occasional visits of the indwelling Lord, or that at some lofty moments of spiritual enthusiasm they may be conscious that He is with them, but that always, in an unbroken line of deep, calm receptiveness, they may possess, and know that they possess, an indwelling Saviour.

And this, I think, is one of the reasons why we may and must distinguish between the apparently very similar petition in the previous verse, about which we were speaking last Sunday, and the petition which is now occupying us; for, as I shall have to show you, it is only as "strengthened with His might by His Spirit in the inner man," that we are capable of the continuous abiding of that Lord within us.

Oh! what a contrast to that idea of a perpetual unbroken inhabitation of Jesus in our spirits and to our consciousness is presented by our ordinary life! "Why shouldst thou be as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" may, well be the utterance of the average Christian. We might, with unbroken blessedness, possess Him in our hearts, and instead, we have only "visits

short and far between." Alas, alas, how often do we drive away that indwelling Christ, because our hearts are "foul with sin," so that He

> "Can but listen at the gate
> And hear the household jar within."

Christian men and women! here is the ideal of our lives, capable of being approximated to (if not absolutely in its entirety reached) with far more perfection than it ever has been before by us. There might be a line of light never interrupted running all through our religious experience. Instead of that there is a light point here, and a great gap of darkness there, like the straggling lamps by the wayside in the half-lighted squalid suburbs of some great city. Is that your Christian life, broken by many interruptions, and having often sounding through it the solemn words of the retreating Divinity which the old profound legend tells us were heard the night before the Temple on Zion was burnt:—"Let us depart?" "I will arise and return unto My place till they acknowledge their offences." God means and wishes that Christ may continuously dwell in our hearts. Does He to your own consciousness dwell in yours?

And then the last thought connected with this first part of my subject is that the heart strengthened by the Spirit is fitted to be the Temple of the indwelling Christ. How shall we prepare the chamber for such a guest? How shall some poor occupant of some wretched hut by the way-side, fit it up for the abode of a prince? The answer lies in these words that precede my text. You cannot strengthen the rafters and lift the roof and adorn the halls and furnish the floor in a manner befitting the coming of the King; but you can turn to that Divine Spirit who will expand and embellish and invigorate your whole spirit, and make it capable of receiving the indwelling Christ.

That these two things which are here considered as cause and effect may, in another aspect, be considered as but varying phases of the same truth is only part of the depth and felicity of the teaching that is here. For if you come to look more deeply into it, the Spirit that strengtheneth with might is the Spirit of Christ; and He dwells in men's hearts by His own Spirit. So that the apparent confusion, arising from what in other places are regarded as identical being here conceived as cause and effect, is no confusion at all, but is explained and vindicated by the deep truth that nothing but the indwelling of the Christ can fit for the indwelling of the Christ. The lesser gift of His presence prepares for the greater measure of it; the transitory inhabitation for the more permanent. Where He comes in smaller measure He opens the door and makes the heart capable of His own more entire indwelling. "Unto him that hath shall be given." It is Christ in the heart that makes the heart fit for Christ to dwell in the heart. You cannot do it by your own power; turn to Him and let Him make you temples meet for Himself.

II.—So now, in the second place, notice the open door through which the Christ comes in to dwell—"that He may dwell in your hearts by faith."

More accurately we may render "through faith," and might even venture to suppose that the thought of faith as an open door through which Christ passes into the heart, floated half distinctly before the Apostle's mind. Be that as it may, at all events faith is here represented as the means or condition through which this dwelling takes effect. You have but to believe in Him and He comes, drawn from Heaven, floating down on a sunbeam, as it were, and enters into the heart and abides there.

Trust, which is faith, is self-distrust. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Rivers do not run on the mountain

tops, but down in the valleys. So the heart that is lifted up and self-complacent has no dew of His blessing resting upon it, but has the curse of Gilboa adhering to its barrenness ; but the low lands, the humble and the lowly hearts, are they in which the waters that go softly, scoop their course, and diffuse their blessings. Faith is self-distrust. Self-distrust brings the Christ.

Faith is desire. Never, never in the history of the world has it been or can it be that a longing towards Him shall be a longing thrown back unsatisfied upon itself. You have but to trust, and you possess. We open the door for the entrance of Christ by the simple act of faith, and blessed be His name ! He can squeeze Himself through a very little chink, and He does not require that the gates should be flung wide open in order that, with some of His blessings, He may come in.

Mystical Christianity of the false sort has much to say about the indwelling of God in the soul, but it spoils all its teaching by insisting upon it that the condition on which God dwells in the soul is the soul's *purifying itself* to receive Him. But you cannot cleanse your hearts so as to bring Christ into them, you must let Him come and cleanse them by the process of His coming, and fit them thereby for His own indwelling. And, asssuredly, He will so come, purging us from our evil and abiding in our hearts.

But do not forget that the faith which brings Christ into the spirit must be a faith which works by love if it is to keep Christ in the spirit. You cannot bring that Lord into your hearts by anything that you do. The man that cleanses his own soul by his own strength, and so expects to draw God into it, has made the mistake which Christ pointed out when He told us that when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he leaves his house *empty*, though it be swept and garnished. Moral reformation may turn out

the devils, it will never bring in God. And in the emptiness of the swept and garnished heart there is an invitation to the seven to come back again and fill it.

And whilst that is true, remember, on the other hand, that a Christian man can drive away his Master by evil works. The sweet song-birds and the honey-making bees are said always to desert a neighbourhood before a pestilence breaks out in it. And if I may so say, similarly quick to feel the first breath of the pestilence is the presence of the Christ which cannot dwell with evil. You bring Christ into your heart by faith, without any work at all; you keep Him there by a faith which produces holiness.

III.—And the last point is the gifts of this indwelling Christ,—"ye being," or as the words might more accurately be translated, "Ye, having been rooted and grounded in love."

Where He comes He comes not empty-handed. He brings His own love, and that, consciously received, produces a corresponding and answering love in our hearts to Him. So there is no need to ask the question here whether "love" means Christ's love to me, or my love to Christ. From the nature of the case both are included,—the recognition of His and the response by mine are the result of His entering into the heart. This love, the recognition of His and the response by mine, is represented in a lovely double metaphor in these words as being at once the soil in which our lives are rooted and grow, and the foundation on which our lives are built and are steadfast.

I have not time to dwell upon these two things, but let me just touch them for a moment. Where Christ abides in a man's heart, love will be the very soil in which his life will be rooted and grow. That love will be the motive of all service, it will underlie, as the productive cause, all fruitfulness. All goodness and all beauty will

be its fruit. The whole life will be as a tree planted in this rich soil. And so the life will grow not by effort only, but as by an inherent power drawing its nourishment from the soil. This is blessedness. It is Heaven upon earth that love should be the soil in which our obedience is rooted, and from which we draw all the nutriment that turns to flowers and fruit.

Where Christ dwells in the heart, love will be the foundation upon which our lives are builded steadfast and sure. The blessed consciousness of His love, and the joyful answer of my heart to it, may become the basis upon which my whole being shall repose, the underlying thought that gives security, serenity, steadfastness to my else fluctuating life. I may so plant myself upon Him, as that in Him I shall be strong, and then my life will not only grow like a tree and have its leaf green and broad, and its fruit the natural outcome of its vitality, but it will rise like some stately building, course by course, pillar by pillar, until at last the shining topstone is set there. He that buildeth on that foundation shall never be confounded.

For, remember, that, deepest of all, the words of my text may mean that the Incarnate Personal Love becomes the very soil in which my life is set and blossoms, on which my life is founded.

"Thou, my Life, O let me be
Rooted, grafted, built in Thee."

Christ is Love, and Love is Christ. He that is rooted and grounded in love has the roots of his being, and the foundation of his life fixed and fastened in that Lord.

So, dear brethren, go to Christ like those two on the road to Emmaus ; and as Fra Angelico has painted them on his convent wall, put out your hands and lay them on His, and say, "Abide with us. Abide with us!" And the answer will come :—"This is my rest for ever ; here" —mystery of love !—"will I dwell, for I have desired it," even the narrow room of your poor heart.

UNKNOWABLE LOVE KNOWN TO LOVE.

SERMON III.

UNKNOWABLE LOVE KNOWN TO LOVE.

"That ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and the length and the depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."—EPH. iii. 18, 19.

THIS constitutes the third of the petitions in this great prayer of Paul's, each of which, as we have had occasion to see in former sermons, rises above, and is a consequence of the preceding, and leads on to, and is a cause or occasion of the subsequent one.

The two former petitions have been for inward strength communicated by a Divine Spirit, in order that Christ may dwell in our hearts, and so we may be rooted and grounded in love. The result of these desires being realised in our hearts is here set forth in two clauses which are substantially equivalent in meaning. "To comprehend" may be taken as meaning nearly the same as "to know," only that, perhaps the former expresses an act more purely intellectual. And, as we shall see in our next sermon, "the breadth and length and depth and height" are the unmeasurable dimensions of the love which in the second clause is described as "passing knowledge." I purpose to deal with these measures in a separate discourse and therefore omit them from consideration now.

We have, then, mainly two thoughts here, the one, that only the loving heart in which Christ dwells can know the love of Christ; and the other that even that heart can *not* know the love of Christ. The paradox is intentional, but it is intelligible. Let me deal then, as well as I can, with these two great thoughts.

I.—First, we have this thought that only the loving heart can know Christ's love.

Now the Bible uses that word *know* to express two different things; one which we call mere intellectual perception; or to put it into plainer words, mere head knowledge such as a man may have about any subject of study and the other a deep and living experience which is possession before it is knowledge, and knowledge because it is possession.

Now the former of these two, the knowledge which is merely the work of the understanding, is of course, independent of love. A man may know all about Christ and His love, without one spark of love in his heart. And there are thousands of people who, as far as the mere intellectual understanding is concerned, know as much about Jesus Christ and His love as the saint who is closest to the Throne, and yet have not one trace of love to Christ in them. That is the kind of people that a widely diffused Christianity and a habit of hearing sermons produce. There are plenty of them here, in this chapel this morning, who, as far as their heads are concerned, know quite as much of Jesus Christ and His love as any of us do, and could talk about it and argue about it, and draw inferences from it, and have got the whole system of evangelical Christianity at their fingers' ends. Ay! It is at their fingers' *ends*, it never gets any nearer them than that.

There is a knowledge with which love has nothing to do, and it is a knowledge that for many people is quite sufficient. "Knowledge puffeth up," says the Apostle;

into an unwholesome bubble of self-complacency that will one day be pricked and disappear; but "love buildeth up"—a steadfast, slowly-rising, solid fabric. There be two kinds of knowledge: the mere rattle of notions in a man's brain, like the seeds of a withered poppy-head; very many, very dry, very hard; that will make a noise when you shake it. And there is another kind of knowledge which goes deep down into the heart, and is the only knowledge worth calling by the name; and that knowledge is the child, as my text has it, of love.

Now let us think about that for a moment. Love, says Paul, is the parent of all knowledge. Well, now, can we find any illustrations from similar facts in other regions? Yes! I think so. How do we know, really know, any emotions of any sort whatever? Only by experience. You may talk for ever about feelings, and you teach nothing about them to those who have not experienced them. The poets of the world have been singing about love ever since the world began. But no heart has learned what love is from even the sweetest and deepest songs. Who that is not a father can be taught paternal love by words, or can come to a perception of it by an effort of mind? And so with all other emotions. Only the lips that have drunk the cup of sweetness or of bitterness can tell how sweet or how bitter it is, and even when they, made wise by experience, speak out their deepest hearts, the listeners are but little the wiser unless they too have been initiated in the same school. Experience is our only teacher in matters of feeling and emotion, as in the lower regions of taste and appetite. A man must be hungry to know what hunger is; he must taste honey or wormwood in order to know the taste of honey or wormwood, and in like manner he cannot know sorrow but by feeling its ache, and must love if he would know love. Experience is our only teacher, and her school-fees are heavy.

Just as a blind man can never be made to understand the glories of sunrise, or the light upon the far-off mountains; just as a deaf man may read books about acoustics, but they will not give him a notion of what it is to hear Beethoven, so we must have love *to* Christ before we know what love to Christ is, and we must consciously experience the love *of* Christ ere we know what the love of Christ is. We must have love *to* Christ in order to have a deep and living possession of the love *of* Christ, though reciprocably it is also true that we must have the love of Christ known and felt by our answering hearts, if we are ever to love Him back again.

So in all the play and counterplay of love between Christ and us, and in all the reaction of knowledge and love this remains true, that we must be rooted and grounded in love ere we can know love, and must have Christ dwelling in our hearts, in order to that deep and living possession which, when it is conscious of itself, is knowledge, and is for ever alien to the loveless heart.

> He must be loved, ere that to you
> He will seem worthy of your love.

If you want to know the blessedness of the love of Christ, love Him, and open your hearts for the entrance of His love to you. Love is the parent of the deep, true knowledge.

Of course, before we can love an unseen person and believe in his love, we must know about him by the ordinary means by which we learn about all persons outside the circle of our sight. So before the love which is thus the parent of deep, true knowledge, there must be the knowledge by study and credence of the record concerning Christ, which supplies the facts on which alone love can be nourished. The understanding has its part to play in leading the heart to love, and then the heart becomes the true teacher. He that loveth, knoweth

God, for God is love. He that is rooted and grounded in love because Christ dwells in his heart, will be strengthened to know the love in which he is rooted. The Christ within us will know the love of Christ. We must first "taste," and then we shall "see" that the Lord is good, as the Psalmist puts it with deep truth. First, the appropriation and feeding upon God, then the clear perception by the mind of the sweetness in the taste. First the enjoyment; then the reflection on the enjoyment. First the love; and then the consciousness of the love of Christ possessed and the love to Christ experienced. The heart must be grounded in love that the man may know the love which passeth knowledge.

Then notice that there is also here another condition for this deep and blessed knowledge laid down in these words, "That ye may be able to comprehend *with all saints*." That is to say, our knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ depends largely on our sanctity. If we are pure we shall know. If we were wholly devoted to Him we should wholly know His love to us, and in the measure in which we are pure and holy we shall know it. This heart of ours is like a reflecting telescope, the least breath upon the mirror of which will cause all the starry sublimities that it should shadow forth to fade and become dim. The slightest moisture in the atmosphere, though it be quite imperceptible where we stand, will be dense enough to shut out the fair, shining, snowy summits that girdle the horizon and to leave nothing visible but the lowliness and commonplaceness of the prosaic plain.

If you want to know the love of Christ, first of all, that love must purify your souls. But then you must keep your souls pure, assured of this, that only the single eye is full of light, and that they who are not "saints" grope in the dark even at mid-day, and whilst drenched by the

sunshine of His love, are unconscious of it altogether. And so we get that miserable and mysterious tragedy men and women walking through life, as many of you are doing, in the very blaze and focus of Christ's love, and never beholding it nor knowing anything about it.

Observe again the beginning of this path of knowledge, which we have thus traced. There must be, says my text, an indwelling Christ, and so an experience, deep and stable, of His love, and then we shall know the love which we thus experience. But how comes that indwelling? That is the question for us. The knowledge of His love is blessedness, is peace, is love, is everything; as we shall see in considering the last stage of this prayer. That knowledge arises from our fellowship with and our possession of the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ. How does that fellowship with, and possession of the love of God in Jesus Christ, come? That is the all-important question. What is the beginning of everything? "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." There is the gate through which you and I may come, and by which we must come if we are to come at all into the possession and perception of Christ's great love. Here is the path of knowledge. First of all there must be the simple historical knowledge of the facts of Christ's life and death for us, with the Scripture teaching of their meaning and power. And then we must turn these truths from mere notions into life. It is not enough to know the love that God has to us, in that lower sense of the word "knowledge." Many of you know that, who never got any blessing out of it all your days, and never will, unless you change. Besides the "knowing" there must be the "believing" of the love. You must translate the notion into a living fact in your experience. You must pass from the simple work of understanding the Gospel to the higher act of faith. You must not be con-

tented with knowing, you must trust. And if you have done that all the rest will follow, and the little, narrow, low doorway of humble self-distrusting faith, through which a man creeps on his knees, leaving outside all his sin and his burden, opens out into the temple palace :— the large place in which Christ's love is imparted to the soul.

Brethren, this doctrine of my text ought to be for every one of us a joy and a gospel. There is no royal road into the sweetness and the depth of Christ's love, for the wise or the prudent. The understanding is no more the organ for apprehending the love of Christ than is the ear the organ for perceiving light, or the heart the organ for learning mathematics. Blessed be God ! the highest gifts are not bestowed upon the clever people, on the men of genius and the gifted ones, the cultivated and the refined, but they are open for all men ; and when we say that love is the parent of knowledge and that the condition of knowing the depths of Christ's heart is simple love which is the child of faith, we are only saying in other words what the Master embodied in His thanksgiving prayer, "I thank Thee, Father ! Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

And that is so, not because Christianity, being a foolish system, can only address itself to fools ; not because Christianity, contradicting wisdom, cannot expect to be received by the wise and the cultured, but because a man's brains have as little to do with his trustful acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a man's eyes have to do with his capacity of hearing a voice. Therefore, seeing that the wise and prudent, and the cultured, and the clever, and the men of genius are always the minority of the race, let us vulgar folk that are neither wise, nor clever, nor cultured, nor geniuses, be thankful that all that has noth-

ing to do with our power of knowing and possessing the best wisdom and the highest treasures, but that upon this path the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err, and all narrow foreheads and limited understandings, and poor, simple uneducated people as well as philosophers and geniuses have to learn love by their hearts and not by their heads, and by a sense of need and a humble trust and a daily experience have to appropriate and suck out the blessing that lies in the love of Jesus Christ. Blessed be His name! The end of all aristocracies of culture and superciliousness of intellect, lies in that great truth that we possess the deepest knowledge and highest wisdom when we love and by our love.

II.—Now a word in the next place as to the other thought here, that not even the loving heart can know the love of Christ.

"It passeth knowledge," says my text. Now I do not suppose that the paradox here of knowing the love of Christ which "passeth knowledge" is to be explained by taking "know" and "knowledge" in the two different senses which I have already referred to, so as that we may experience, and know by conscious experience, that love which the mere understanding is incapable of grasping. That of course is an explanation which might be defended, but I take it that it is much truer to the Apostle's meaning to suppose that he uses the words "know" and "knowledge" both times in the same sense. And so we get familiar thoughts which I touch upon very briefly.

Our knowledge of Christ's love, though real, is incomplete, and must always be so. You and I believe, I hope, that Christ's love is not a man's love; or at least that it is more than a man's love. We believe that it is the flowing out to us of the love of God, that all the fulness of the Divine heart pours itself through that narrow channel of the human nature of our Lord, and therefore that the flow is endless and the Fountain infinite.

I suppose I do not need to show you that it is possible for people to have, and that in fact we do possess a real, a valid, a reliable knowledge of that which is infinite; although we possess, as a matter of course, no adequate and complete knowledge of it. But I only remind you that we have before us in Christ's love something which, though the understanding is not by itself able to grasp it, yet the understanding led by the heart can lay hold of, and can find in it infinite treasures. We can lay our poor hands on His love as a child might lay its tiny palm upon the base of some great cliff, and hold that love in a real grasp of a real knowledge and certitude, but we cannot put our hands round it and feel that we *com*prehend as well as *ap*prehend. Let us be thankful that we cannot.

His love can only become to us a subject of knowledge as it reveals itself in its manifestations. Yet after even these manifestations, it remains unuttered and unutterable even by the Cross and grave, even by the glory and the throne. "It is as high as Heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

We have no measure by which we can translate into the terms of our experience, and so bring within the grasp of our minds, what was the depth of the step which Christ took at the impulse of His love, from the Throne to the Cross. We know not what he forewent; we know not, nor ever shall know, what depths of darkness and soul-agony He passed through at the bidding of His all-enduring love to us. Nor do we know the consequences of that great work of emptying Himself of His glory. We have no means by which we can estimate the darkness and the depth of the misery from which we have been delivered, nor the height and the radiance of the glory to which we are to be lifted. And until we can tell and measure by our compasses both of these two extremes of

possible human fate, till we have gone down into the deepest abyss of a bottomless pit of growing alienation and misery, and up above the highest reach of all unending progress into light and glory and God-likeness, we have not stretched our compasses wide enough to touch the two poles of this great sphere, the infinite love of Jesus Christ. So we bow before it, we know that we possess it with a knowledge more sure and certain, more deep and valid, than our knowledge of aught but ourselves; but yet it is beyond our grasp, and towers above us inaccessible in the altitude of its glory, and deep beneath us in the profundity of its condescension.

And, in like manner, we may say that this known love passes knowledge, inasmuch as our experience of it can never exhaust it. We are like the settlers on some great island continent—as, for instance, on the Australian continent for many years after its first discovery—a thin fringe of population round the sea-board here and there, and all the bosom of the land untraversed and unknown. So after all experiences of and all blessed participation in the love of Jesus Christ which come to each of us by our faith, we have but skimmed the surface, but touched the edges, but received a drop of what if it should come upon us in fulness of flood like a Niagara of love would overwhelm our spirits.

So we have within our reach not only the treasure of creatural affections which bring gladness into life when they come, and darkness over it when they depart; we have not only human love which, if I may so say, is always lifting its finger to its lips in the act of bidding us adieu; but we may possess a love which will abide with us for ever. Men die, Christ lives. We can exhaust men, we cannot exhaust Christ. We can follow other objects of pursuit all of which have limitation to their power of satisfying and pall upon the jaded sense sooner or later,

or sooner or later are wrenched away from the aching heart. But here is a love into which we can penetrate very deep and fear no exhaustion ; a sea into which we can cast ourselves, nor dread that like some rash diver flinging himself into shallow water where he thought there was depth, we may be bruised and wounded. We may find in Christ the endless love that an immortal heart requires. Enter by the low door of faith, and your finite heart will have the joy of an infinite love for its possession, and your mortal life will rise transfigured into an immortal and growing participation in the immortal Love of the indwelling and inexhaustible Christ.

THE PARADOX OF LOVE'S MEASURE.

SERMON IV.

THE PARADOX OF LOVE'S MEASURE.

"The breadth, and length, and depth, and height."—Eph. iii. 18.

Of what? There can, I think, be no doubt as to the answer. The next clause is evidently the continuation of the idea begun in that of our text, and it runs; "and to know the *love of Christ* which passeth knowledge." It is the immeasurable measure, then; the boundless bounds and dimensions of the love of Christ which fire the Apostle's thoughts here. Of course, he had no separate idea in his mind attaching to each of these measures of magnitude, but he gathered them together simply to express the one thought of the greatness of Christ's love. Depth and height are the same dimension measured from opposite ends. The one begins at the top and goes down, the other begins at the bottom and goes up, but the surface is the same in either case. So we have the three dimensions of a solid here—breadth, length, and depth.

I suppose that I may venture to use these expressions with a somewhat different purpose from that for which the Apostle employs them; and to see in each of them a separate and blessed aspect of the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. What, then, is the breadth of that love?

It is as broad as humanity. As all the stars lie in the firmament, so all creatures rest in the Heaven of His love. Mankind has many common characteristics. We all suffer, we all sin, we all hunger, we all aspire, hope, and die; and, blessed be God! we all occupy precisely the same relation to the Divine love which lies in Jesus Christ. There are no step-children in God's great family, and none of them receive a more grudging or a less ample share of His love and goodness than every other. Far-stretching as the race, and curtaining it over as some great tent may enclose on a festal day a whole tribe, the breadth of Christ's love is the breadth of humanity.

And it is universal because it is Divine. No human mind can be stretched so as to comprehend the whole of the members of mankind, and no human heart can be so emptied of self as to be capable of this absolute universality and impartiality of affection. But the intellectual difficulties which stand in the way of the width of our affections and the moral difficulties which stand still more frowningly and forbiddingly in the way, have no power over that love of Christ's which is close and tender, and clinging with all the tenderness and closeness and clingingness of a human affection and lofty and universal and passionless and perpetual, with all the height and breadth and calmness and eternity of a Divine heart.

And this broad love, broad as humanity, is not shallow because it is broad. Our love is too often like the estuary of some great stream which runs deep and mighty as long as it is held within narrow banks, but as soon as it widens becomes slow and powerless and shallow. The intensity of human affection varies inversely as its extension. A universal philanthropy is a passionless sentiment. But Christ's love is deep though it is wide, and suffers no diminution because it is shared amongst a multitude. It is

like the great feast that He Himself spread for five thousand men, women, and children, all seated at a table, "and they did all eat and were filled."

The whole love is the property of each recipient of it. He does not love as we do, who give a part of our heart to this one and a part to that one, and share the treasure of our affections amongst a multitude. All this gift belongs to every one, just as all the sunshine comes to every eye, and as every beholder sees the moon's path across the dark waters, stretching from the place where he stands to the centre of light.

This broad love, universal as humanity, and deep as it is broad, is universal because it is individual. You and I have to generalise, as we say, when we try to extend our affections beyond the limits of household and family and personal friends, and the generalising is a sign of weakness and limitation. Nobody can love an abstraction, but God's love and Christ's love do not proceed in that fashion. He individualises, loving each and therefore loving all. It is because every man has a space in his heart singly and separately and conspicuously, that all men have a place there. So our task is to individualise this broad, universal love, and to say, in the simplicity of a glad faith, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." The breadth is world-wide, and the whole breadth is condensed into, if I may so say, a shaft of light which may find its way through the narrowest clink of a single soul. There are two ways of arguing about the love of Christ, both of them valid, and both of them needing to be employed by us. We have a right to say, "He loves all, therefore He loves me." And we have a right to say, "He loves me, therefore He loves all." For surely the love that has stooped to me can never pass by any human soul.

What is the breadth of the love of Christ? It is broad as mankind, it is narrow as myself.

II.—Then, in the next place, what is the length of the love of Christ?

If we are to think of Him only as a man, however exalted and however perfect, you and I have nothing in the world to do with His love. When He was here on earth it may have been sent down through the ages in some vague way, as the shadowy ghost of love may rise in the heart of a great statesman or philanthropist for generations yet unborn, which he dimly sees will be affected by his sacrifice and service. But we do not call that love. Such a poor, pale, shadowy thing has no right to the warm throbbing name; has no right to demand from us any answering thrill of affection. Unless you think of Jesus Christ as something more and other than the purest and the loftiest benevolence that ever dwelt in human form, I know of no intelligible sense in which the length of His love can be stretched to touch you.

If we content ourselves with that altogether inadequate and lame conception of Him and of His nature, of course there is no present bond between any man upon earth and Him, and it is absurd to talk about His present love as extending in any way to me. But we have to believe, rising to the full height of the Christian conception of the nature and person of Christ, that when He was here on earth the Divine that dwelt in Him so informed and inspired the human as that the love of His man's heart was able to grasp the whole, and to separate the individuals that should make up the race till the end of time; so as that you and I, looking back over all the centuries, and asking ourselves what is the length of the love of Christ, can say, "It stretches over all the years, and it reached then as it reaches now to touch me, upon whom the ends of the earth have come." Its length is conterminous with the duration of humanity here or yonder.

That thought of eternal being, when we refer it to God, towers above us and repels us; and when we turn it to ourselves and think of our own life as unending, there come a strangeness and an awe that is almost shrinking, over the thoughtful spirit. But when we transmute it into the thought of a love whose length is unending, then over all the shoreless, misty, melancholy sea of eternity, there gleams a light, and every wavelet flashes up into glory. It is a dreadful thing to think, "For ever, Thou art God." It is a solemn thing to think "For ever I am to be;" but it is life to say:—"O Christ! Thy love endureth from everlasting to everlasting; and because it lives. I shall live also—" "Oh! give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

There is another measure of the length of the love of Christ. "Master! How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven."—So said the Christ, multiplying perfection into itself twice—two sevens and a ten—in order to express the idea of boundlessness. And the law that He laid down for His servant is the law that binds Himself. What is the length of the love of Christ? Here is one measure of it,—howsoever long drawn out my sin may be, this is longer; and the white line of His love runs out into infinity, far beyond the point where the black line of my sin stops. Anything short of eternal patience would have been long ago exhausted by your sins and mine, and our brethren's. But the pitying Christ, the eternal Lover of all wandering souls, looks down from Heaven upon every one of us; goes with us in all our wanderings, bear with us in all our sins, in all our transgressions still is gracious. His pleadings sound on, like some stop in an organ continuously persistent through all the other notes. And round His throne are written the Divine words which

have been spoken about our human love modelled after His "Charity suffereth long and is kind; is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things." The length of the love of Christ is the length of eternity, and out-measures all human sin.

III.—Then again, what is the depth of that love? Depth and height, as I said at the beginning of these remarks, are but two ways of expressing the same dimension. For the one we begin at the top and measure down, for the other we begin at the bottom and measure up. The top is the Throne; and the downward measure, how is it to be stated? In what terms of distance are we to express it? How far is it from the Throne of the Universe to the manger at Bethlehem, and the Cross at Calvary, and the sepulchre in the garden? That is the depth of the love of Christ. Howsoever far may be the distance from that loftiness of co-equal Divinity in the bosom of the Father, and radiant with glory, to the lowliness of the form of a servant, and the sorrows, limitations, rejections, pains and death—that is the measure of the depth of Christ's love. We can estimate the depth of the love of Christ by saying "He came from above, He tabernacled with us," as if some planet were to burst from its track and plunge downwards in amongst the mist and the narrowness of our earthly atmosphere.

A well-known modern scientist has hazarded the speculation that the origin of life on this planet, has been the falling upon it of the fragment of a meteor, or an aerolite from some other system, with a speck of organic life upon it, from which all has developed. Whatever may be the case in regard of the physical life, that is absolutely true in the case of spiritual life. It all originates because this Heaven-descended Christ has come down the long staircase of Incarnation, and has brought with Him into the clouds and oppressions of our terrestrial atmosphere a

germ of life which He has planted in the heart of the race, there to spread for ever. That is the measure of the depth of the love of Christ.

And there is another way to measure it. My sins are deep, my helpless miseries are deep, but they are shallow as compared with the love that goes down beneath all sin, that is deeper than all sorrow, that is deeper than all necessity, that shrinks from no degradation, that turns away from no squalor, that abhors no wickedness so as to avert its face from it. The purest passion of human benevolence cannot but sometimes be aware of disgust mingling with its pity and its efforts, but Christ's love comes down to the most sunken. However far in the abyss of degradation any human soul has descended, beneath it are the everlasting arms, and beneath it is Christ's love. When a coalpit gets blocked up by some explosion no brave rescuing party will venture to descend into the lowest depths of the poisonous darkness until some ventilation has been restored. But this loving Christ goes down, down, down into the thickest, most pestilential atmosphere, reeking with sin and corruption, and stretches out a rescuing hand to the most abject and undermost of all the victims. How deep is the love of Christ? The deep mines of sin and of alienation are all undermined and countermined by His love. Sin is an abyss, a mystery, how deep only they know who have fought against it; but

> "O Love! thou bottomless abyss,
> My sins are swallowed up in thee."

"I will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The depth's of Christ's love go down beneath all human necessity, sorrow, suffering, and sin.

IV.—And, lastly, what is the height of the love of Christ?

We found that the way to measure the depth was to begin at the Throne, and go down to the Cross, and to the

foul abysses of evil. The way to measure the height is to begin at the Cross and the foul abysses of evil, and to go up to the Throne. That is to say, the topmost thing in the Universe, the shining apex and pinnacle, glittering away up there in the radiant unsetting light, is the love of God in Jesus Christ. The other conceptions of that Divine nature spring high above us and tower beyond our thoughts, but the summit of them all, the very topmost as it is the very bottom-most, outside of everything, and therefore high above everything, is the love of God which has been revealed to us all, and brought close to us sinful men in the manhood and passion of our dear Christ.

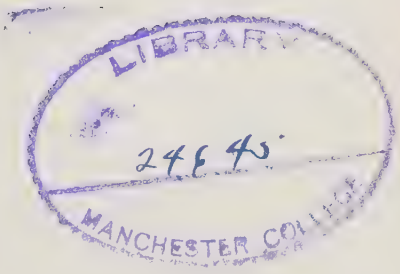
And that love which thus towers above us, and gleams like the shining cross on the top of some lofty cathedral spire, does not flash up there inaccessible, nor lie before us like some pathless precipice, up which nothing that has not wings can ever hope to rise, but the height of the love of Christ is an hospitable height, which can be scaled by us. Nay, rather, that heaven of love which is "higher than our thoughts," bends down, as by a kind of optical delusion the physical heaven seems to do, towards each of us, only with this blessed difference, that in the natural world the place where heaven touches earth is always the furthest point of distance from us; and in the spiritual world, the place where Heaven stoops to me is always right over my head, and the nearest possible point to me. He has come to lift us to Himself. And this is the height of His love, that it bears us up, if we will, up and up to sit upon that throne where He Himself is enthroned.

So, brethren, Christ's love is round about us all, as some sunny tropical sea may embosom in its violet waves a multitude of luxuriant and happy islets. So all of us islanded on our little individual lives, lie in that great ocean of love, all the dimensions of which are immeasurable, and

which stretches above, beneath, around, shoreless, tideless, bottomless, endless.

But, remember, this ocean of love you can shut out of your lives. It is possible to plunge a jar into mid-Atlantic, further than soundings have ever descended, and to bring it up on deck as dry inside as if it had been lying on an oven. It is possible for men and women—and I have them listening to me at this moment—to live and move and have their being in that sea of love, and never to have let one drop of its richest gifts into their hearts or their lives. Open your hearts for Him to come in, by humble faith in His great sacrifice for you. For, if Christ dwell in your heart by faith, then and only then will experience be your guide; and you will be able to comprehend the boundless greatness, the endless duration, and absolute perfection, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

THE CLIMAX OF ALL PRAYER.



SERMON V.

THE CLIMAX OF ALL PRAYER.

"That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."—EPH. iii. 19.

THE Apostle's many-linked prayer, which we have been considering in successive sermons, has reached its height. It soars to the very Throne of God. There can be nothing above or beyond this wonderful petition. Rather, it might seem as if it were too much to ask, and as if, in the ecstasy of prayer, Paul had forgotten the limits that separate the creature from the Creator, as well as the experience of sinful and imperfect men, and had sought to "wind himself too high for mortal life beneath the sky." And yet Paul's prayers are God's promises; and we are justified in taking these rapturous petitions as being distinct declarations of God's desire and purpose for each of us; as being the end which He had in view in the unspeakable gift of His Son; and as being the certain outcome of His gracious working on all believing hearts.

It seems at first a paradoxical impossibility; looked at more deeply and carefully it becomes a possibility for each of us, and therefore a duty; a certainty for all the redeemed in fullest measure hereafter; and, alas! a rebuke to our low lives and feeble expectations. Let us look,

then, at the petition, with the desire of sounding, as we may, its depths and realising its preciousness.

I.—First of all, think with me of the significance of this prayer.

"The fulness of God" is another expression for the whole sum and aggregate of all the energies, powers, and attributes of the Divine nature, the total Godhead in its plenitude and abundance.

"God is love," we say. What does that mean, but that God desires to impart His whole self to the creatures whom He loves? What is love in its lofty and purest forms, even as we see them here on earth; what is love except the infinite longing to bestow one's self? And when we proclaim that which is the summit and climax of the revelation of our Father in the person of His Son, and say with the last utterances of Scripture that "God is love," we do in other words proclaim that the very nature and deepest desire and purpose of the Divine heart is to pour itself on the emptiness and need of His lowly creatures in floods that keep back nothing. Lofty, wonderful, incomprehensible to the mere understanding as this thought may be, clearly it is the inmost meaning of all that Scripture tells us about God as being the "portion of His people," and about us, as being by Christ and in Christ "heirs of God," and possessors of Himself.

We have, then, as the promise that gleams from these great words, this wonderful prospect, that the Divine love, truth, holiness, joy, in all their rich plenitude of all-sufficient abundance, may be showered upon us. The whole Godhead is our possession. For the fulness of God is no far-off remote treasure that lies beyond human grasp and outside of human experience. Do not we believe that, to use the words of this Apostle in another letter, "it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell"? Do we not believe that, to use the words

of the same Epistle, "In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"? Is not that abundance of the resources of the whole Deity insphered and incarnated in Jesus Christ our Lord, that it may be near us, and that we may put out our hand and touch it? This may be a paradox for the understanding, full of metaphysical puzzles and cobwebs, but for the heart that knows Christ, most true and precious. God is gathered into Jesus Christ, and all the fulness of God, whatever that may mean, is embodied in the Man Christ Jesus, that from Him it may be communicated to every soul that will.

For, to quote other words of another of the New Testament teachers, "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." And to quote words in another part of the same Epistle, we may "all come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." High above us, then, and inaccessible though that awful thought, "the fulness of God," may seem, as the zenith of the unscaleable heavens seems to us poor creatures creeping here upon the flat earth, it comes near, near, near, ever nearer, and at last tabernacles among us, when we think that in Him all the fulness dwells, and it comes nearer yet and enters into our hearts when we think that "of His fulness have we all received."

Then, still further, observe another of the words in this petition:—"That ye may be filled." That is to say, Paul's prayer and God's purpose and desire concerning us is, that our whole being may be so saturated and charged with an indwelling Divinity as that there shall be no room in our present stature and capacity for more, and no sense of want or aching emptiness.

Ah! brethren, when we think of how eagerly we have drunk at the stinking puddles of earth, and how after every draught there has yet been left a thirst that was pain, it is something for us to hear Him say:—"The water

that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—and "he that drinketh of this water shall never thirst." Our empty hearts, with their experiences of the insufficiency and the vanity of all earthly satisfaction, stand there like the water-pots at the rustic marriage, and the Master says, "Fill them to the brim." And then, by His touch, the water of our poor savourless, earthly enjoyments is transmuted and elevated into the new wine of His Kingdom. We may be filled, satisfied with the fulness of God.

There is another point as to the significance of this prayer, on which I must briefly touch. As our Revised Version will tell you, the literal rendering of my text is, "filled *unto*" (not exactly *with*) "all the fulness of God;" which suggests the idea not of a completed work but of a process, and of a growing process, as if more and more of that great fulness might pass into a man. Suppose a number of vessels, according to the old illustration about degrees of glory in Heaven; they are each full, but the quantity that one contains is much less than that which the other may hold. Add to the illustration that the vessels can grow, and that filling makes them grow; as a shrunken bladder when you pass gas into it will expand and round itself out, and all the creases will be smoothed away. Such is the Apostle's idea here that a process of filling goes on which may satisfy the then desires, because it fills us up to to the then capacities of our spirits; but in the very process of so filling and satisfying, makes those spirits capable of containing larger measures of His fulness, which therefore flow into it. Such, as I take it, in rude and faint outline, is the significance of this great prayer.

II.—Now turn in the next place, to consider briefly the possibility of the accomplishments of this petition.

As I said, it sounds as if it were too much to desire.

Certainly no wish can go beyond this wish. The question is, can a sane and humble wish go as far as this; and can a man pray such a prayer with any real belief that he will get it answered here and now? I say yes!

There are two difficulties that at once start up.

People will say, does such a prayer as this upon man's lips not forget the limits that bound the creature's capacity? Can the finite contain the Infinite?

Well, that is a verbal puzzle, and I answer, yes! The finite can contain the Infinite, if you are talking about two hearts that love, one of them God's and one of them mine. We have got to keep very clear and distinct before our minds the broad, firm line of demarcation between the creature and the Creator, or else we get into a pantheistic region where both creature and Creator expire. But there is a Christian as well as an atheistic pantheism, and as long as we retain clearly in our minds the consciousness of the personal distinction between God and His child, so as that the child can turn round and say, "I love Thee," and God can look down and say, "I bless thee;" then all identification and mutual indwelling and impartation from Him of Himself are possible, and are held forth as the aim and end of Christian life.

Of course in a mere abstract and philosophical sense the Infinite cannot be contained by the finite; and attributes which express infinity, like omnipresence and omniscience and omnipotence and so on, indicate things in God that we can know but little about, and that cannot be communicated. But those are not the Divinest things in God. "God is love." Do you believe that that saying unveils the deepest things in Him? God is light, "and in Him is no darkness at all." Do you believe that His light and His love are nearer the centre than these attributes of power and infinitude? If we believe that, then we can come

back to my text, and say, "The love, which is Thee, can come into me; the light, which is Thee, can pour itself into my darkness; the holiness, which is Thee, can enter into my impurity. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee. Thou dwellest in the humble and in the contrite heart."

So, dear brethren, the old legends about mighty forms that contracted their stature and bowed their Divine heads to enter into some poor man's hut, and sit there, are simple Christian realities. And instead of puzzling ourselves with metaphysical difficulties which are mere shadows, and the work of the understanding or the spawn of words, let us listen to the Christ when He says, "We will come into him and make our abode with him," and believe that it was no impossibility which fired the Apostle's hope when he prayed, and in praying prophesied, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Then there is another difficulty that rises before our minds; and Christian men say, "How is it possible, in this region of imperfection, compassed with infirmity and sin as we are, that such hopes should be realised for us here." Well, I would rather answer that question by retorting and saying: "How is it possible that such a prayer should have come from inspired lips unless the thing that Paul was asking might be?" Did he waste his breath when he thus prayed? Are we not as Christian men bound, instead of measuring our expectations by our attainments, to try to stretch our attainments to what are our legitimate expectations, and to hear in these words the answer to the faithless and unbelieving doubt whether such a thing is possible, and the assurance that it is possible.

An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded: "Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect." An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded to let Christ abide in our hearts.

Oh! if we believed less in the power of our sin it would have less power upon us. If we believed more in the power of an indwelling Christ He would have more power within us. If we said to ourselves, "It is possible," we should make it possible. The impossibility arises only from our own weakness, from our own sinful weakness; and though it may be true, and is true, that none of us will live without sin as long as we abide here, it is also true that each moment of interruption of our communion with Christ, and therefore each moment of interruption of that being "filled with the fulness of God," might have been avoided. We know about every such time that we could have helped it if we had liked. And it is no use bringing any general principles about sin cleaving to men in order to break the force of that conviction. But if that conviction be a real one, and if whenever a Christian man loses the consciousness of God in his heart, making him blessed, he is obliged to say: "It was my own fault and Thou wouldst have stayed if I had chosen," then there follows from that, that it is possible, notwithstanding all the imperfection and sin of earth, that we may be "filled with all the fulness of God."

So, dear brethren, take you this prayer as the standard of your expectations; and oh! take it as we must all take it, as the sharpest of rebukes to our actual attainments in holiness and in likeness to our Master. Set by the side of these wondrous and solemn words.—"filled with the fulness of God," the facts of the lives of the average professing Christians of this generation, and of this congregation; their emptiness, their ignorance of the Divine indwelling, their want of anything in their experience that corresponds in the least degree to such words as these. Judge whether a man is not more likely to be bowed down in wholesome sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness, if he has before him such an ideal as this of my text,

than if it, too, has faded out of his life. I believe, for my part, that one great cause of the worldliness and the sinfulness and mechanical formalism that are eating the life out of the Christianity of this generation, is the fact of the Church having largely lost any real belief in the possibility that Christian men may possess the fulness of God as their present experience. And so, when they do not find it in themselves they say: "Oh! It is all right; it is the necessary result of our imperfect fleshly condition." No! It is all wrong; and His purpose is that we should possess Him in the fulness of His gladdening and hallowing power, at every moment in our happy lives.

III.—One word to close with, as to the means by which this prayer may be fulfilled.

Remember, it comes as the last link in a chain. I shall have wasted my breath for a month, as far as you are concerned, if you do not feel that the preceding links are needful before this can be attained.

But I only touch upon the nearer of them and remind you that it must be Christ dwelling in our hearts, that fills them with the fulness of God. Where He comes God comes. And where does He come? He comes where faith opens the door for Him. If you will trust Jesus Christ, if you will distrust your selves, if you will turn your thoughts and your hearts to Him, if you will let Him come into your souls, and not shut him out because your souls are so full that there is no room for Him there, then when He comes He will not come empty-handed, but will bring the full Godhead with Him.

There must be the emptying of self, if there is to be the filling with God. And the emptying of self is realised in that faith which forsakes self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-dependence, self-control, self-pleasing, and yields itself wholly to the dear Lord.

There is another condition that is required, and that is the previous link in this braided chain. The conscious experience of the love which is in Christ will bring to us "the fulness of God." Love is power; love is God; and when we live in the sense and experience of God's love to us then we have the power and we have the God. It is as in some of these petrifying streams, the water is charged with particles which it deposits upon everything that is laid in its course. So, if we plunge our hearts into that fountain of the love of Christ, as it flows it will clothe us with all the Divine energies which are held in solution in the Divinest thing in God, His own love. Plunged into the love we are filled with the fulness.

Then keep near your Master. It all comes to that. Meditate upon Him; do not let days pass, as they do pass, without a thought being turned to Him. Do not go about your daily work without a remembrance of Him. Keep yourselves in Christ. Seek to experience His love, that love which passeth knowledge, and is only known by them who possess it. And then, as the old painters with deep truth used to paint the Apostle of Love with a face like his Master, living near Christ and looking upon Him you will receive of His fulness, and "we all, with open face, beholding the glory, shall be changed into the glory."

CHRIST'S TOUCH.

SERMON VI.

CHRIST'S TOUCH.

"Jesus put forth His hand and touched him."—Mark i. 41.

"BEHOLD the servant of the Lord" might be the motto of this Gospel, and "He went about doing good, and healing," the summing up of its facts. We have in it comparatively few of our Lord's discourses, none of His longer, and not very many of His briefer ones. It contains but four parables. This Evangelist gives no miraculous birth as in Matthew, no angels adoring there as in Luke, no gazing into the secrets of Eternity, where the Word, Who afterwards became flesh, dwelt in the bosom of the Father, as in John. He begins with a brief reference to the Forerunner, and then plunges into the story of Christ's life of service to man, and service for God.

In carrying out his conception the Evangelist omits many things found in the other Gospels, which involve the idea of dignity and dominion, while he adds to the incidents which he has in common with them not a few fine and subtle touches to heighten the impression of our Lord's toil and eagerness in His patient loving service. Perhaps it may be an instance of this that we find more prominence given to our Lord's touch as connected with

His miracles than in the other Gospels, or perhaps it may merely be an instance of the vivid portraiture, the result of a keen eye for externals, which is so marked a characteristic of this gospel. Whatever the reason, the fact is plain, that Mark delights to dwell on Christ's touch. The instances are these—first, He puts out His hand, and "lifts up" Peter's wife's mother, and immediately the fever left her (i. 31), then, unrepelled by the foul disease, He lays His pure hand upon the leper, and the living mass of corruption is healed (i. 41); again, He lays His hand on the clammy marble of the dead child's forehead, and she lives (i. 41). Further, we have incidental statement that He was so hindered in His mighty works by unbelief that He could only lay His hands on a few sick folk and heal them (vi. 5). We find next two remarkable incidents, peculiar to Mark, both like each other and unlike our Lord's other miracles. One is the gradual healing of that deaf and dumb man whom Christ took apart from the crowd, laid His hands on him, thrust His fingers into his ears as if He would clear some impediment, touched his tongue with saliva, said to him, "Be opened"; and the man can hear (vii. 34). And the other is, the gradual healing of a blind man whom our Lord again leads apart from the crowd, takes by the hand, lays His own kind hands upon the poor sightless eyeballs, and with singular slowness of progress effects a cure, not by a leap and a bound as He generally does, but by steps and stages; tries it once and finds partial success, has to apply the curative process again and then the man can see (viii. 23). In addition to these instances there are two other incidents which may also be adduced. It is Mark alone who records for us the fact that He took little children in His arms, and blessed them. And it is Mark alone who records for us the fact that when He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration He laid His hand upon the demoniac boy,

writhing in the grip of his tormentor, and lifted him up.

There is much taught us, if we will patiently consider it, by that touch of Christ's, and I wish to try to bring out its meaning and power.

I.—Whatever diviner and sacreder aspect there may be in these incidents, the first thing; and in some senses the most precious thing in them is that they are the natural expression of a truly human tenderness and compassion.

Now we are so accustomed, and as I believe quite rightly, to look at all Christ's life down to its minutest events as intended to be a revelation of God, that we are sometimes apt to think about it as if His motive and purpose in everything was didactic. So an unreality creeps over our conceptions of Christ's life, and we need to be reminded that He was not always acting and speaking in order to convey instruction, but that words and deeds were drawn from Him by the play of simple human feelings. He pitied not only in order to teach us the heart of God, but because His own man's heart was touched with a feeling of men's infirmities. We are too apt to think of Him as posing before men with the intent of giving the great revelation of the Love of God. It is the love of Christ Himself, spontaneous, instinctive, without the thought of anything but the suffering it sees, which gushes out and leads Him to put forth His hand to the outcast beggars, the blind, the deaf, the lepers. That is the first great lesson we have to learn from this and other stories,—the swift human sympathy and heart of grace and tenderness which Jesus Christ had for all human suffering; and has to-day as truly as ever.

There is more than this instinctive sympathy taught by Christ's touch. But it is distinctly taught. How beautifully that comes out in the story of the leper! That wretched man had long dwelt in his isolation. The touch of a friend's hand or the kiss of loving lips had been

long denied him. Christ looks on him, and before he reflects the spontaneous impulse of pity breaks through the barriers of legal prohibitions, and of natural repugnance, and leads Him to lay His holy and healing hand on His foulness.

True pity always instinctively leads us to seek to come near those who are its objects. A man tells his friend some sad story of his sufferings, and while he speaks, unconsciously his listener lays his hand on his arm and, by a silent pressure, tells his sympathy. So Christ did with these men—not only in order that He might reveal God to us, but because He was a man, and therefore felt ere He thought. Out flashed from his heart the swift sympathy, followed by the tender pressure of the loving hand—a hand that tried through flesh to reach spirit and come near the sufferer that it might succour and remove the sorrow.

Christ's pity is shown by His touch to have this true characteristic of true pity, that it overcomes disgust. All real sympathy does that. Christ is not turned away by the shining whiteness of the leprosy, nor by the eating pestilence beneath it; He is not turned away by the clammy marble hand of the poor dead maiden, nor by the fevered skin of the old woman gasping on her pallet. He lays hold on each, the flushed patient, the loathsome leper, the sacred dead, with the all-equalising touch of a universal love and pity, which disregards all that is repellent and overflows every barrier and pours itself over every sufferer. We have the same pity of the same Christ to trust to and to lay hold of to-day. He is high above us and yet bending over us; stretching His hand from the throne as truly as He put it out when here on earth; and ready to take us all to His heart, in spite of our weakness and wickedness, our failings and our shortcomings, the fever of our flesh and

hearts' desires, the leprosy of our many corruptions, and the death of our sins,—and to hold us ever in the strong gentle clasp of His Divine, Omnipotent, and tender hand. This Christ lays hold on us because He loves us, and will not be turned from His compassion by the most loathsome foulness of ours.

II.—And now take another point of view from which we may regard this touch of Christ: namely as the medium of His miraculous power.

There is nothing to me more remarkable about the miracles of our Lord than the royal variety of His methods of healing. Sometimes He works at a distance, sometimes He requires, as it would appear for good reasons, the proximity of the person to be blessed. Sometimes He works by a simple word: "Lazarus come forth!" "Peace be still!" "Come out of him!" sometimes by a word and a touch, as in the instances before us; sometimes by a touch without a word; sometimes by a word and a touch and a vehicle, as in the saliva that was put on the tongue, and in the ears of the deaf, and on the eyes of the blind; sometimes by a vehicle without a word, without a touch, without His presence, as when He said "Go wash in the pool of Siloam! and he washed and was clean." So the Divine worker varies infinitely and at pleasure yet not arbitrarily but for profound, even if not alway discoverable, reasons, the methods of His miracle-working power, in order that we may learn by these varieties of ways that He is tied to no way; and that His hand, strong and almighty, uses methods and tosses aside methods according to His pleasure, the methods being vitalised when they are used by His will, and being nothing at all in themselves.

The very variety of His methods, then, teaches us that the true cause in every case is His own bare will. A simple word is the highest and most adequate expression

of that will. His word is all powerful: and that is the very signature of divinity. Of Whom has it been true from of old that "He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast?" Do you believe in a Christ Whose bare will, thrown among material things, makes them all plastic, as clay in the potter's hands, whose mouth rebukes the demons and they flee, rebukes death and it looses its grasp, rebukes the tempest and there is a calm, rebukes disease and there comes health?

But this use of Christ's touch as apparent means for conveying His miraculous power also serves as an illustration of a principle which is exemplified in all His revelation, namely, the employment in condescension to men's weakness, of outward means as the apparent vehicles of His spiritual power. Just as by the material vehicle sometimes employed for cure, He gave these poor sensebound natures a ladder by which their faith in His healing power might climb, so in the manner of His revelation and communication of His spiritual gifts, there is provision for the wants of us men, who ever need some body for spirit to make itself manifest by, some form for the ethereal reality, some "tabernacle" for the "sun." "Sacraments," outward ceremonies, forms of worship are vehicles which the Divine Spirit uses in order to bring His gifts to the hearts and the minds of men. They are like the touch of the Christ which heals, not by any virtue in itself, apart from His will which chooses to make it the apparent medium of healing. All these externals are nothing, as the pipes of an organ are nothing, until His Breath is breathed through them, and then the flood of sweet sound pours out.

Do not despise the material vehicles and the outward helps which Christ uses for the communication of His healing and His life, but remember that the help that is done upon earth, He does it all Himself. Even

Christ's touch is nothing, if it were not for His own will which flows through it.

III.—Consider Christ's touch as a shadow and symbol of the very heart of His work.

Go back to the past history of this man. Ever since his disease declared itself no human being had touched him. If he had a wife he had been separated from her; if he had children their lips had never kissed his, nor their little hands found their way into his hard palm. Alone he had been walking with the plague-cloth over his face, and the cry "unclean!" on his lips, lest any man should come near him. Skulking in his isolation how he must have hungered for the touch of a hand! Every Jew was forbidden to approach him but the priest, who, if he were cured might pass his hand over the place and pronounce him clean. And here comes a man Who breaks down all the restrictions, stretches a frank hand out across the walls of separation and touches him. What a reviving assurance of love not yet dead, must have come to the man as Christ grasped his hand, even if he saw in him only a stranger who was not afraid of him and did not turn from him!

But beside this thrill of human sympathy, which came hope-bringing to the leper, Christ's touch had much significance, if we remember that, according to the Mosaic legislation, the priest and the priest alone was to lay his hands on the tainted skin and pronounce the leper whole. So Christ's touch was a priest's touch. He lays His hand on corruption and is not tainted. The corruption with which He comes in contact becomes purity. Are not these really the profoundest truths as to His whole work in the world? What is it all but laying hold of the leper and the outcast and the dead—His sympathy leading to His identification of Himself with us in our weakness and misery?

That sympathetic life-bringing touch is put forth once for all in His Incarnation and Death. "He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, looking at our Lord's work under this same metaphor, and explaining that His laying hold of men was His being "made in all points like unto his brethren." Just as he took hold of the fevered woman and lifted her from her bed; or, as He thrust His fingers into the deaf ears of that poor man stopped by some impediment, so, in analogous fashion, He becomes one of those whom He would save and help. In His assumption of humanity and in His bowing of His head to death, we behold Him laying hold of our weakness and entering into the fellowship of our pains and of the fruit of sin.

Just as He touches the leper and is unpolluted, or the fever patient and receives no contagion, or the dead and draws no chill of mortality into His warm hand, so He becomes like His brethren in all things, yet without sin. Being found in the likeness of sinful flesh, He knows no sin, but wears His manhood unpolluted and dwells among men blameless and harmless, the Son of God, without rebuke. Like a sunbeam passing through foul water untarnished and unstained; or like some sweet spring rising in the midst of the salt sea, which yet retains its freshness and pours it over the surrounding bitterness, so Christ takes upon Himself our nature and lays hold of our stained hands with the hand that continues pure while it grasps us, and will make us purer if we grasp it.

Brethren! Let your touch answer to His; and as He lays hold of us, in His incarnation and His death, let the hand of our faith clasp His outstretched hand, and though our hold be as faltering and feeble as that of the trembling, wasted fingers which one timid woman once laid on His garment's hem, the blessing which we need will flow into our veins from the contact. There will be cleansing

for our leprosy, sight for our blindness, life driving out death from its throne in our hearts, and we shall be able to recount our joyful experience in the old Psalmist's triumphant strains—"He sent me from above, He laid hold upon me, he drew me out of many waters."

IV.—Finally we may look upon these incidents as being in a very important sense a pattern for us.

No good is to be done by any man to his fellows except at the cost of true sympathy which leads to identification and contact. The literal touch of your hand would do more good to some poor outcasts than much solemn advice, or even much material help flung to them as from a height above them. A shake of the hand might be more of a means of grace than a sermon, and more comforting than ever so many free breakfasts and blankets given superciliously.

And, symbolically, we may say that we must be willing to take those by the hand whom we wish to help; that is to say, we must come down to their level, try to see with their eyes, and to think their thoughts, and let them feel that we do not think our purity too fine to come beside their filth, nor shrink from them with repugnance, however we may show disapproval and pity for their sin. Much work done by Christian people has no effect, nor ever will have, because it has peeping through it a poorly concealed "I am holier than thou." An instinctive movement of repugnance has ruined many a well-meant effort.

Christ has come down to us, and has taken all our nature upon Himself. If there is an outcast and abandoned soul on earth which may not feel that Jesus has laid a loving and healing touch on him, Jesus is not the Saviour for the world. He shrinks from none, He unites Himself with all, therefore He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

His conduct is the pattern and the law for us. A Church

is a poor affair if it be not a body of people whose experience of Christ's pity and gratitude for the life which has become theirs through His wondrous making Himself one with them, compel them to do the like in their degree for the sinful and the outcast. Thank God! there are many in every communion who know that constraint of the love of Christ! But the world will not be healed of its sickness till the great body of Christian people awakes to feel that the task and honour of each of them is to go forth bearing Christ's pity certified by their own.

The sins of professing Christian countries are largely to be laid at the door of the Church. We are idle when we ought to be at work. We pass by on the other side when bleeding brethren lie with wounds gaping to be bound up by us. And even when we are moved to service by Christ's love, and try to do something for them and for our fellows, our work is often tainted by a sense of our own superiority, and we patronise when we should sympathise, and lecture when we should beseech.

We must be content to take lepers by the hand, if we would help them to purity, and to let every outcast feel the warmth of our pitying, loving grasp, if we would draw them into the forsaken Father's House. Lay your hands on the sinful as Christ did, and they shall recover. All your holiness and hope come from Christ's laying hold of you. Keep hold of Him, and make His great pity and loving identification of Himself with the world of sinners and sufferers, your pattern as well as your hope, and your touch, too, will have virtue. Keeping hold of Him Who has taken hold of us, you, too, may be able to say "Ephphatha, be opened," or to lay your hand on the leper and he shall be cleansed.

THE COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL.

SERMON VII.

THE COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL.

"Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith."—Heb. xii. 2

WE have heard, in the previous chapter, the great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith, whose lives of heroic endurance and supernatural strength are laid as the basis of the exhortation in the previous verse: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us."

They are figured as a luminous "cloud of witnesses." They are witnesses, inasmuch as they testify how noble a thing life may be made when inspired by faith; inasmuch, too, as they testify of the faithfulness of God, Who never left them, even in their sorrows, and Who now bears witness to them that they were righteous. They compass us like a luminous cloud, or like that background of one of Raphael's great pictures, which at first sight seems only a bright mist, but looked at more closely is all full of calm angel-faces. But here in our text one solitary figure shines out, and all the "cloud of witnesses" fades away like morning mist.

Christ's place is apart from theirs. They stand grouped together, the army of the faithful; He stands alone, its Captain and Commander. Their lives may be a motive

for perseverance, and we may say "seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud . . . let us run with patience." But He gives the power by which we can run, and "looking unto Jesus" is the condition on which alone we can fulfil the command.

And so we have to consider the remarkable aspects and relationships in reference to our faith, in which Christ is here set forth.

I.—First we have Him as Leader and Commander of the great army of the faithful—"Jesus, the Author of our faith."

Now, I need not remind many of you, I suppose, of two facts bearing upon the interpretation of these words. First, that that little word "our" is a supplement, and may without detriment, and with some advantage, be omitted; and second, that the word "author" here does not mean so much "one who originates" or "causes" as "one who begins and leads."

It is the same expression as that which is employed, as some of you know, in the second chapter of this epistle, and is rendered, there "the *Captain* of our salvation"; and is employed once more in the Acts of the Apostles, and is there translated "the *Prince* of Life." In all these passages the most natural meaning is, beginner, leader, or forerunner, one coming in advance of those who follow. And so Christ is here represented, not so much as one Who originates faith in men's hearts, but as the Leader of all the long procession of those who live by faith. He is the "Commander of the faithful," "the Captain of the Lord's host" of believing souls. True, the heroes whose names are enrolled in the glorious catalogue of the preceding chapter were before Him in time. But the commander may march in the centre, as well as in the van, and even in order of time, He is the Beginner or Leader, inasmuch as He is the first Who ever lived a perfect life of

faith. Jesus, then, is here presented to us as Himself exercising faith, as being the great Pattern and Example of it.

And bearing upon this remarkable conception of our Lord, observe the use here of the personal name Jesus, not the name of office, Christ. Stress is thereby laid upon the humanity of our Lord. The Man Jesus was so truly one of ourselves that He, too, lived the life which He lived in the flesh by faith.

This is the only place in the New Testament in which faith is attributed, in so many words, to our Lord. But in this same epistle, in an earlier chapter, we find the writer adducing it as one of the clearest proofs of His true manhood and brotherhood with us, that the words of the psalm "I will put my trust in Him" may stand as the embodiment of the very spirit of His life. We do not give sufficient prominence in our thoughts of Christ's earthly life, to this aspect of it—that it was one of faith. He is our Pattern in this as in all that belongs to humanity. He proved His manhood not only by His participation in our corporeal necessities, though his share in them does touchingly show us how really He was our Brother. He sat wearied by the well, He hungered, He thirsted, He slept, He felt pain, He died. Nor are we to look upon His participation in our common human emotions as being the selectest proof of His humanity; precious as it is to know that He sorrowed and rejoiced and wept, and was grieved, and wondered and pitied, and was angry. But we are to see His brotherhood in this, that all which binds us men to God in the acts of humble dependence and filial trust belonged to His experience, and that, as He is pattern in all else, He is pattern in this too. His life was a life of faith, and its life breath was prayer.

For faith is dependence upon God, and surely never did human being so utterly hang upon the Father, nor

submit himself so absolutely to be moulded and determined by Him, nor yield his will up so completely to that will as did He Who could say, "The living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father."

Faith is communion, and surely never did a spirit dwell in such deep and constant realisation of a Divine presence and a Divine sustaining as did that Christ Who could say "the Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please Him." That pure mirror, without a flaw, without a distortion, ever reflected the brightness of the Father's face; and the unbroken continuity of Christ's communion with God by faith is witnessed to us by that exceeding great and bitter cry which He put forth on the Cross, when the weight of a world's sin snapped even that strong bond; and with a strange new sense of desolation, He had to say, "My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Faith is the vivid realisation of the unseen; and surely never was there a life lived amidst the shows and gauds and illusions of time which so manifestly and transparently was all passed in the vivid consciousness of that unseen world, as was the life of that Son of Man, Who, in the midst of all earth's engagements, could call Himself "the Son of Man which *is* in Heaven."

Faith is a life of assured confidence in an unseen future, and surely never was there a life which was so entirely dominated by that unseen hope, as His life, Who, as the next clause says: "For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

And so, dear brethren, this Jesus, in the absoluteness of His dependence upon the Father, in the completeness of His trust in Him, in the submission of His will to that Supreme command, in the unbroken communion which He held with God, in the vividness with which the Unseen ever burned before Him, and dwarfed and ex-

tinguished all the lights of the present, and in the respect "which He had unto the recompense of reward;' nerving Him for all pain and shame, has set before us all the example of a life of faith, and is our Pattern, as in everything, in this too.

How blessed it is to feel, when we reach out our hands and grope in the darkness for the unseen hand, when we try to bow our wills to that Divine will; when we try to look beyond the mists of "that dim spot which men call earth," and to discern the land that is very far off; and when we try to nerve ourselves for duty and sacrifice by bright visions of a future hope, that on this path of faith too, when He "putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them," and has bade us do nothing which He Himself has not done! "I will put My trust in Him," He says first, and then He turns to us, and commands, "Believe in God, believe also in Me."

II.—But that is not all that our text gives us. This relationship between Christ and faith, that of pattern and example, by no means exhausts the truth. So we have added a very significant expression, which leads us to consider Christ next as being set forth here as the "Finisher," or Perfecter "of faith."

That word has received a great many explanations, with which I do not need to trouble you; but instead of the translation of our Authorised Version, "Finisher," which is ambiguous, we may adopt that given in the Revised Version, "Perfecter." How then does Christ perfect faith? I think we may answer that He does so in a twofold-way.

First, Christ perfects our faith inasmuch as by His own grace flowing into us He sustains it and leads it to sovereign power. It would be a very poor affair if all we had to say to men was:—"There is a beautiful example; follow it!" Models are all very well, only unfortunately

there is nothing in a model to secure its being copied. You may have a most exquisite piece of penmanship lithographed on the top of the page in a child's copybook, but what is the good of that if the poor little hand is trembling when it takes the pen, and if the pen has got no ink in it, or the child does not want to learn? Copybooks are all very well, but you want something more than copybooks. There are plenty of good examples in this world. The world is not damned for want of good examples, but these are not all that is needed. A so-called Christianity that has nothing more to say about Jesus Christ than that He is the perfect example of all human excellences, and of faith too, is not the one for a poor man that has found out the plague of his own heart, and the weakness of his own will. He wants something that will come a great deal closer to Him than that. And so my text tells us that Jesus is not only "the Leader of faith," but the "*Perfecter*" of it too. He will set you the pattern, and then, if you will let Him, He will come into your hearts, and make you able to copy the pattern. He will bridge over the great hopeless gulf that lies between the perfect Example and our depraved tastes and sluggish wills and limited and shattered powers and He will come and put His Spirit into our spirits. If you only begin to trust Him in the very smallest degree, that will be the opening of the chink through which He will pass, and in passing will widen the aperture, that more of His grace and love may come into your hearts. He will perfect faith by the implanting in your hearts of His own spirit and His own life.

He will lead our faith to sovereign power in our lives, if we will only let Him do it, by another way, too—by the path of discipline and of sorrow; drawing away our hearts from earthly things and fixing them upon Himself; making the world dark that the sky above may

be brighter, and revealing Himself to our loneliness as the all-sufficient Companion. So He perfects our faith.

And He will do it in another way too, by the rewards and blessings which He will give to the imperfect and tentative exercise of our confidence, over-answering our petitions, and flooding us with more than we expected when we tremulously tried to trust in Him; and so inducing us to be bolder in our confidence, and to venture further afield. Thus, He draws us further out into the great sea of His love. As a boy learning to swim, after trying in the shallows and finding that the water bears him up, has confidence to strike out into deeper water, so Christ perfects our faith by rewarding it; and with a smile, when we are surprised at the greatness of His bestowments, says to us: "The Lord is able to give thee much more than these." "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it."

And not only so, but in another aspect that dear Lord is the Perfecter of our faith, inasmuch as He gives to our faith at the last the full salvation which is its aim and end. A thing may be said to be perfected when it either reaches its highest degree, or when it attains its object. And so Christ is the Perfecter of our faith, not only in the sense that He raises and educates it up to its loftiest form, but also that He bestows upon it at the last that which is, as Peter says, its "end," or "perfecting," "even the salvation of our souls." And in this aspect we may almost take the word "Perfecter" here to be equivalent to that of the other idea of Rewarder. Our faith is perfected when the unseen things are unveiled, when the communion with God is complete, when we see Christ as He is and clasp Him in the close embrace of Heaven, and when the crown of life is bestowed which He has promised to them that love Him.

But that consummation of faith in the full salvation is

not its termination, for faith will live through eternity, not in the form of realising and hoping for an unseen future, but in the form of confidence in God ; and for ever it will be true—"Now abideth these three ; Faith, Hope, Charity." And His work of perfecting our faith, which assuredly He shall crown with the laurel of victory, seeing that He sustains it amidst the conflicts of earth, is made certain for us by the fact referred to in the immediate context, that He is now sitting at the right hand at the Throne of God. The words which follow my text seem to refer to both portions of it—"Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame,"—there is the Leader of our faith—"and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God,"—there is the Rewarder of our faith. Because He is there He will bring us there. We look to the toiling, the patient, suffering, earthly Christ, and we see in Him the Captain Who calls us to follow Him in the good fight of faith. We lift our eyes to the Heavenly throned Christ, and we see in Him the Forerunner, Who for us has entered into the rest and glory, and we rejoice in confidence that His triumph is the pledge of ours, that He will sustain our faith that it fail not, and at last will crown even our poor trust with the crown of life.

III.—That leads me to say one last word about that "looking to Jesus" which is the indispensable condition of "running the race that is set before us."

The occupation of heart and mind with Jesus Christ is the secret of practical Christianity. The measure in which I think about Him, and in which the thought of Him has power in my daily life, is accurately the measure of my religion. That and no more is the extent to which I am a Christian. How much are you a Christian? "Looking unto Jesus"—once a week, on a Sunday morning? For five minutes, now and then, when there is

nothing else to do? In a formal prayer when you get up in the morning; in a wearied prayer before you tumble into bed at night? Is that the extent of it? "Looking unto Jesus" as a propitiation, Who died for you, that—somehow or other—you may get pardon, and do not much mind whether you get holiness or not? Is *that* your "looking unto Jesus"? That is not the looking unto Jesus that will ever help you to run the race of a noble life, or will bring you a crown at the last There must be a loving, believing, habitual look.

Look to Him as your pattern, and be ashamed; look to Him as your pattern and be instructed; look to Him as your pattern and be encouraged. It is an education to love Him and live with Him. Transformation comes by beholding. The eye that looks upon the light has an image of the light formed upon its ball, and the man that looks to Christ gets like Christ, and "beauty born of" that gaze "shall pass into his face."

Look to Him as the Sustainer of your faith. In your feebleness, when life is low, when hope is almost dead, when temptations are tyrannous and strong, think of Him, and think in trust. And if you will cry to Him, "Lord! I believe! help Thou mine unbelief," you will be able thankfully to repeat after one of old, "When I said, my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." Look to Him as your Rewarder, and be of good cheer and let the prospect of that great crown stimulate and sustain and lift you above the ills and the sorrows of life.

And last of all, there is an untranslated preposition in one of the words of my text to which, perhaps, it is not straining too much to give emphasis. The full rendering of the expression "looking" is *looking away*. That points to the need of looking off from something else, that we may look up to Him.

It always takes a resolute effort fixedly to contemplate,

and to bring heart and mind really into contact with, unseen things and unseen persons. And it takes a very strenuous effort to bring the unseen Christ before the mind habitually, and so as to produce effects in the life. You have to shut out a great deal besides in order to do that; as a man will shade his eyes with his hand in order to see some distant thing the more clearly. Keep out the cross lights, that you may look forward. You cannot see the stars when you are walking down a town street, and the gas-lamps are lit. All those violet depths and calm abysses and blazing worlds are concealed from you by the glare at your side—sulphurous and stinking. So, my brother! if you want to see into the depths and the heights, to see the Great White Throne and the Christ on it Who helps you to fight, you have to go out unto Him beyond the camp, and leave all its dazzling lights behind you.

"Look off unto Jesus." Look away from other patterns and examples, look away from the illusory joys of earth—the golden apples which hinder us in the race. Look away from other helpers and supports, precious and dear as they may be. Look away from the difficulties and dangers. When a man is walking along some narrow ledge amongst the Alps with the precipice at his side, the guide will say to him: "Do not look down, or you perish."

Your only hope is looking up. When Peter saw the water boisterous, he began to sink. Fix your eye on Christ, and then your tottering faith will go in safety.

Look away from yourselves. You will get no strength by looking at your own weakness, no righteousness by looking at your own sinfulness, no healing by contemplating your own disease. The only cure is to turn away your eyes from the world and yourself, from all other helpers and patterns, to forget both the army of the faithful and the army of the aliens, and to look at the

Commander, and take your example and your stimulus, your hope and your strength from Him.

And oh, then, dear friends, be sure of this, that if amid all our weakness and weariness, our solitude, our sorrow, and our sin, we look up to Him with trustful hearts and recognise Him in all the fulness and variety of His manifold relations to us and to our faith, the old experience will be fulfilled in us; and of us it will be true:—"This poor man cried and the Lord heard him. They looked unto Him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed."

THE COMMANDER'S CONFLICT AND TRIUMPH.

SERMON VIII.

THE COMMANDER'S CONFLICT AND TRIUMPH.

"Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—HEB. xii. 2.

OUR Lord is described in the former part of this verse as sustaining a double relation to our faith, viz., as being in some sense the Leader of the army of the faithful, the Pattern for all believers; and secondly, as being the Perfecter of their faith.

These two aspects of our Lord's work are further set forth in these words, the former of which presents Him with more detail as the Pattern whom believers have to follow; and the latter as set at the right hand of God, that from thence He may help those who are still struggling here below.

I may then complete the former sermon by looking at this further expansion of the leading ideas with which it was occupied.

We have set forth here, then, as the great object of contemplation which will assist Christians "in running the race set before them," first, the Commander's conflict, and our share in it; and second, the Commander's triumph, and our share in that.

I.—First, the Commander's conflict: "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame."

Now, there are three points about our Lord's life set forth in these three clauses, which, taken together, present another phase of it than that which is most common in Scripture. We have the motive of His sufferings given as being an unseen reward for Himself, which He brought vividly before Him by the exercise of His faith. We have His sufferings presented, not in reference to their saving power, but solely as an instance of heroic patient endurance. And we have the contumely and shame of His death adduced not as showing to us His willing self-abasement and His loving lowliness, but as revealing to us the scorn with which He looked upon all hindrances that sought to bar His path and shake His resolute will.

These three things then, thrown together, present to us a somewhat unfamiliar, but most blessed and most true and helpful aspect of our Lord's character and sufferings. Let us look at each one of them as a pattern for us.

First, then, we have our Lord's whole life represented as being shaped and influenced by a vivid realisation of an unseen reward; which vivid realisation He owed to His faith. What was this unseen reward? The "joy that was set before Him." The image of the race is carried on here from the previous verses. At the winning post hangs the glittering crown, full in the view of the runners; so shining afar, and ever in the eye of that fighting, struggling Captain of our salvation, hung the gleaming glories of the "joy that was set before Him."

And what was the joy? I think the subsequent words of the text must be taken as being the answer to it, for "the joy that was set before Him" is naturally interpreted as the joy into which He has entered, viz., His session at the right hand of God, or in other words, the lifting up of His Manhood into a participation with Divinity.

Now that is not the motive for Christ's sufferings which is generally set before us in the New Testament. We have them usually traced to one of two great and solemn motives,—the one, obedience to God, and the other, love to man. But there is no contradiction between the more common representation and that of our text. The one motive does not exclude the others. Though the immediate object of the author in this context leads him to bring out here one motive alone, he presents the others in other parts of his letter, and has much to say about the brotherly love and filial obedience and priestly pity which impelled Jesus to His sufferings. Here these others are presupposed, and we have to combine all these various representations, and to remember that along with the strong impulse of obedience to the will of the Father, and in perfect harmony with self-forgetting and supreme love to the whole world, another strand of the golden cord which bound our great Sacrifice to the horns of the altar was the thought of the joy that was to come to Himself, which was His sitting at the right hand of the Throne.

And if this seems to introduce an element of self-regard into our Lord's passion, which strikes cold on our hearts, let us not forget that all that exaltation is for our sakes, that it had all been left for our sakes by the Incarnate Word, and that all which He won by His cross and passion, was but the entrance of His manhood into the glory which was His own before the world was. Nor are we to forget that He is "*for us* entered" within the veil nor that His exaltation is in order to His saving to the uttermost them who come unto God by Him. As He did not look upon His equality with God, before His incarnation, as a thing to be eagerly retained, so He did not look upon His sitting on the Father's Throne, after His passion, as a thing to be eagerly desired for Himself

alone, but chiefly because by it He could carry on and complete His great work. So that we may allowably say that the joy of the Lord is the salvation of His servants. "He shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied." The joy of the shepherd when he bears the lost sheep on his shoulders, and the joy of the householder when the lost treasure is recovered, and the joy of a true elder brother when the prodigal comes home—are all blended in that great motive which nerved Jesus for His cross, and form not only a part, but the chief part of the joy that was set before Him.

This issue of our Lord's life He had to keep before Himself by a constant effort. He trod the same path which others have to tread. He, too, like Abraham and Moses, and the others in the previous chapter, had to keep his conviction of an unseen good, bright and powerful, by an effort of will, while surrounded by the illusions of time and sense. His faith grasped the unseen, and in the strength of that conviction impelled Him to do and suffer.

We have the same path to tread. We too, if we are to do anything in this world befitting or like our Master, must rule our lives in the same fashion as our Master ruled His. That is to say, we must subordinate rigidly the present, and all its temptations, fascinations, cares, joys and sorrows to that far-off issue discerned by faith and by faith alone, but by faith clearly ascertained to be the one real substance, the thing for which it is worth while to live and blessed to die. A life of faith, a life of effort to keep ever before us the unseen crown will be a life noble and lofty. We are ever tempted to forget it. The "Man with the muck-rake," in John Bunyan's homely parable, was so occupied with the foul-smelling dung-heap which he thought a treasure, that he had no eyes for the crown hanging a hair's breadth over his head. A hair's breadth? Yes! And yet the distance was as great as if the universe had lain between.

Every man's life is ennobled in the measure in which he lives for a future. Even if it be a poor and near future, in so far as it is future, such a life is better than a life that is lived for the present. A man that gets his wages once in a twelve-month will generally be, in certain respects, a higher type of man than he who gets them once a week. To take far-off views is, *pro tanto*, as far as it goes—an elevation of humanity. To be absorbed in the present moment is to be degraded to the level of the beasts.

And you Christian people may have ever before you as your aim the loftiest of all future objects. The Christian "prize," which faith makes clear to us, has the great advantage over all other objects of pursuit—that it is too far off ever to be reached and left behind. Men in this world win their objects or lose them; but in either case they pass them and leave them in the rear. Whether is it better to creep, like the old mariners, from headland to headland, altering your course every day or two, or to strike boldly out into the great deep, steering for a port on the other side of the world, that you never beheld, though you know it is there? Which will be the nobler voyage? If one looks at the lives of most professing Christian people, yours and mine, it seems as if we had but a very dim vision of this glory. And surely, surely, if there is one thing that needs to be rung into your ears, dear brethren, compassed about as you are by the fascinations, temptations, and occupations of this life, it is that old exhortation, never more needed than by the worldly-minded Christians of this day, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Take Christ for your example, and live, "having respect unto the recompense of the reward."

We have also our Lord's life set forth before us here as being the Captain's great pattern to His soldiers of

heroic endurance. "He endured the Cross." And that does not merely mean "experienced the pain," but it means *stood steadfast under*, endured in the fullest and noblest sense of the word. Many a man endures suffering in the lower sense who does not endure it in the higher; but Christ did so in both. And, of course, that endurance of the Cross was not confined to the moments of His life when the actual physical pain of the Crucifixion was upon Him, but stretched through His whole career. For if we believe the testimony of the Apostle John, the certainty of the Cross was before Him from the very beginning of His work; and it was in the opening hours of His ministry that He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up;" and to the Jewish ruler: "As Moses lifted up the serpent so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up." Therefore we may apply this "endurance" of my text, not only to the moment of actual suffering of the physical fact of the Crucifixion, but to the whole of our Lord's earthly career.

The word emphasises, in accordance with the whole strain of the context, the patient, heroic steadfastness with which He bore them. That is an aspect of our Lord's character that is not often enough presented to our minds. The velvet glove has hidden the iron hand in popular apprehension. That will like adamant could not be moved, could not be broken, and never faltered. Temptations which shatter feebler resolutions, as the waves some crumbling dyke, broke like the vain spray against that breakwater. His fixed will led Him to tread, from the beginning to the end of His career, a path every step of which was strewed with hot ploughshares and sharp swords. He trod it with bleeding and with seared feet, but without a quiver, and without a falter. As the hour drew near, we read that "He steadfastly set His face"—made it hard as a flint—to go to Jerusalem, impelled by that

threefold, mighty force of obedience to the Father, love to man, and vision of the glory, so that His disciples were struck with wonder and awe at the fixed determination stamped on the settled countenance, and manifested in the eager steps which outran them on the rocky road to the Cross.

Brethen, that heroic endurance must be ours too, if we are not to rot in selfish and inglorious ease. Life at first may seem gay and brilliant, a place for recreation, or profit, or pleasure, but we very soon find out that it is a sand-strewn wrestling ground. Many flowers cannot grow where are the feet of the runner and the strife of the combatants. The first thing done to make an arena for wrestlers is to take away the turf and the daisies, then to beat the soil down hard and flat. And so our lives get flattened, stripped of their beauty, and their fragrance, because they are not meant to be gardens, but wrestling grounds. There come to every life that is worth living hours of sacrifice when duty can only be done at the cost of a bleeding heart. Every man that is not the devil's servant has to carry a cross, and to be fastened to it, if he will do his Master's work. Besides which crucifixion in service, there are all the other common sorrows storming in upon us, so that sometimes it is as much as a man can do not to be swept away by the current but to keep his footing in mid-channel. Brethren! If you are to run the race that is set before you, the first lesson to learn is this: you have to "endure the cross," and the way to endure the cross is to look unto the crown, and the Christ.

The last of the points in which our Lord here is set forth as the Captain Whose struggles are the pattern for His people, is in what I may call the wholesome and wise contempt for the ills that bar His progress:—"despising the shame."

Contempt is an ugly word, but there are things which

deserve it; and though we do not often associate the idea of it with the meek and gentle Christ, there were things in His life on which it was exercised. He despised the contumely. That is to say: He reduced it to its true insignificance by taking the measure of it, and looking at it as it was. And that is what I want you to feel we all of us have in our power. There are hosts of difficulties in our lives as Christian men, which will be big or little, just as we choose to make them. You can either look at them through a magnifying or a diminishing glass. The magnitude of most of the trifles that affect us may be altered by our way of looking at them. Learn the practical wisdom of minimising the hindrances to your Christian career, pulling them down to their true smallness. Do not let them come to you and impose upon you with the notion that they are big and formidable. The most of them are only white sheets with a rustic boor behind them, like village ghosts. Go up to them and they will be small immediately. "Despise the shame," and it disappears.

And how is that to be done? In two ways. Go up the mountain, and the things in the plain will look very small; the higher you rise the more insignificant they will seem. Hold fellowship with God, and live up beside your Master, and the threatening foes here will seem very, very unformidable.

Another way is—pull up the curtain, and gaze on what is behind it. The low foot-hills that lie at the base of some Alpine country may look high when seen from the plain, as long as the snowy summits are wrapped in mist, but when a little puff of wind comes and clears away the fog from the lofty peaks, nobody looks at the little green hills in front. So the world's hindrances, and the world's difficulties and cares, look very lofty till the cloud lifts But when we see the great white summits, everything

lower does not seem so very high after all. Look to Jesus, and that will dwarf the difficulties.

II.—And now, I have only space for a word or two about the second thought, the Commander's triumph, and our share in it. He is set down "at the right hand of the throne of God."

I need not dwell at any length upon the great ideas attached to that wonderful phrase, but just ask you to remember that the new thing which accrued because of Christ's Incarnation and sacrifice was that, as our text puts it with great emphasis, "*Jesus* sat at the right hand of the Throne"; or, to put it into other words, that the humanity of our Lord and Brother was lifted up to a participation in Divinity and the rule of the universe. That "sitting" expresses Rest, as from a finished and perfect work; a Rest which is not inactivity; Dominion extending over all the universe, and Judgment. These three, Rest, Dominion, Judgment, are the prerogatives of the Man Jesus. That is what He won by His bloody passion and sacrifice.

And now what has that to do with us? We are to think of this triumph of the Commander as being, first of all, a revelation and a prophecy for us. Nobody knows anything about the future life except by means of Jesus Christ. We have no knowledge of another world except as we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His Ascension up on high. We may have dreams, we may have hopes, we may have forebodings, we may argue from analogy, we may get the length of saying "peradventure," "probably"; but we cannot say we *know*, unless we will consent to take all our light, and all our knowledge, and all our certitude, and all our hope from that great Lord Whose death and resurrection are to the whole world the only guarantee of the future, Whose presence there is the only light in all the darkness.

In His exaltation to the Throne a new hope dawns on humanity. If we believe that the Man Jesus sits on the throne of the universe, we have a new conception of what is possible for His brethren. If a perfect human nature has entered into the participation of the Divine, our natures too *may* be perfect, and what He is and where He is, there, too, we may hope to come. So this Epistle in the second chapter, quoting the grand words of the Psalm, which sometimes and in some moods seem more like irony than revelation: "Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour; Thou hast put all things under His feet," comments: "We see not yet all things put under Him." Nay, much the contrary. Look at all this weary world, with its miseries and its cares. What has become of the grand dream of the psalm? Has it all gone into moonshine and vapour? "We see not *yet* all things put under Him." Weary centuries have rolled away, and it does not seem a bit nearer. "But we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." He, and not all these failures and abortions of existing manhood,—He is the type of what God means us to be, and of what we all may one day become. This crowned Jesus has "tasted death for every man." And so, brethren, sad, and mad, and bad as men may be, the conquering Captain at the right hand of God's Throne is the measure and the pattern of what the worst of us may hope to be.

And, still further, Christ's triumphal entrance into the heavens is not only prophecy of ours but it is power to fulfil its own prophecy. He has gone up on high, sitting at the right hand of the Throne of God to work for us. His work is not done. True, on the Cross He proclaimed "It is finished," but the ending of the work on the Cross was but the beginning of a form of His work for us, which shall never cease until the trumpet of victory shall sound "It is done," when the world has yielded to His love. He

works for us, with us, and in us, as Lord of Providence and King of Grace, sustaining and upholding us in all our weakness, and tending the smoky flame of our dim faith till it bursts into clear radiance. The Captain has gone up from the field, and His soldiers are still in it. But He has not left them to struggle alone. He sits on high, looking down on us still fighting in the arena with wild beasts; but He does not only behold but also helps our conflict, as Stephen, looking up, saw Him "standing," not sitting, at the right hand of God, as if He had sprung to His feet to succour and receive the martyr's spirit. Nor is He exalted only to work for, and in us, or to shed on our hearts the plenteous rain of His heavenly influences. He has entered within the veil as our Great High Priest, to make intercession for us, so making us confident that His great sacrifice is ever present to the Divine mind, as determining its acts towards those who trust in Christ. Nor is our share in His exaltation limited by these great privileges, for He has gone to prepare a place for us, and dimly as we know what that means, we know, at all events, that but for Christ's presence there Heaven would be no place for us.

Nor is this all, for, if we have given our hearts to Him and are joined to the Lord by faith, we are, in a very profound sense, one Spirit with Him. So real is the union between us and Jesus, that it cannot be that the Head shall be glorified and the members have no share in the glory. The Captain of Salvation is laurelled and crowned, and all His soldiers, the weakest and the sinfullest amongst them, if only they are knit to Him by humble faith, share in His victory, receive from His Throne showers of grace and blessing, which He pours down upon them, are inspired by His continual presence Who "teaches their hands to war and their fingers to fight," and will be brought at last by Him coming for them again, to a share in His throne.

And so each of us, if only we take Christ for our Lord and Commander, may say, in the calmness of a confident hope, what David's soldier said to him in the heroism of his self-devotion, "As my Lord the King liveth, in what place soever my Lord the King shall be, whether in life or death, there also shall thy servant be."

THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES.

SERMON IX.

THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES.

"Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."—MATT. xxiv. 28.

THIS grim parable has, of course, a strong Eastern colouring. It is best appreciated by dwellers in those lands. They tell us that no sooner is some sickly animal dead, or some piece of carrion thrown out by the way, than the vultures—for the eagle does not prey upon carrion—appear. There may not have been one visible a moment before in the hot blue sky, but taught by scent or by sight that their banquet is prepared, they come flocking from all corners of the heavens, a hideous crowd round their hideous meal, fighting with flapping wings and tearing it with their strong talons. And so, says Christ, wherever there is a rotting, dead society, a carcass hopelessly corrupt and evil, down upon it, as if drawn by some unerring attraction, will come the angel, the vulture of the Divine judgment.

The words of our text were spoken, according to the version of them in Luke's Gospel, in answer to a question from the disciples. Our Lord had been discoursing, in very solemn words, which, starting from the historical event of the impending fall of Jerusalem, had gradually

passed into a description of the greater event of His second coming. And all these solemn warnings had stirred nothing deeper in the bosoms of the disciples than a tepid and idle curiosity which expressed itself in the one almost irrelevant question, "Where, Lord?" He answers—not here, not there, but everywhere where there is a carcass. The great event which is referred to in our Lord's solemn words is a future judgment, which is to be universal. But the words are not exhausted in their reference to that event. There have been many "comings of the Lord," many "days of the Lord," which on a smaller scale have embodied the same principles as shall be displayed in world-wide splendour and awfulness at the last.

I.—The first thing, then, in these most true and solemn words is this, that they are to us a revelation of a law which operates with unerring certainty through all the course of the world's history.

We cannot tell, but God can, when evil has become incurable; or when, in the language of my text, the man or the community has become a carcass. There may be flickerings of life, all unseen by our eyes, or there may be death, all unsuspected by our shallow vision. So long as there is a possibility of amendment, "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily;" and God dams back, as it were, the flow of His retributive judgment; "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth." But when He sees that all is vain, that no longer is restoration or recovery possible, then He lets loose the flood; or, in the language of my text, when the thing has become a carcass, then the vultures, God's scavengers, come and clear it away from off the face of the earth.

Now that is the law that has been working from the beginning, working as well in regard of the long delays

as in regard of the swift execution. There is another metaphor, in the Old Testament, that puts the same idea in a very striking form. It speaks about God's "awakening," as if His judgment slumbered. All round that dial there the hand goes creeping, creeping, creeping slowly, but when it comes to the appointed line, then the bell strikes. And so years and centuries go by, all chance of recovery departs, and then the crash! The ice palace, built upon the frozen blocks, stands for a while, but when the spring thaws come it breaks up. Just let me remind you of some instances and illustrations. Take that story which people stumble over in the early part of the Old Testament revelation—the sweeping away of those Canaanitish nations whose hideous immoralities had turned the land into a perfect stye of abominations. There they had been wallowing, and God's Spirit, which strives with men ever and always, had been striving with them, we know not how long, but when the time came at which, according to the grim metaphor of the Old Testament, "the measure of their iniquity was full," then He hurled upon them the fierce hosts out of the desert, and in a whirlwind of fire and sword swept them off the face of the earth.

Take another illustration. These very people who had been the executioners of Divine judgment settled in the land, fell into the snare—and you know the story. The captivities of Israel and Judah were other illustrations of the same thing. The fall of Jerusalem, to which our Lord pointed in the solemn context of these words, was another. For millenniums God had been pleading with them, sending His prophets, rising early and sending, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate!" "And last of all He sent His Son." Christ being rejected, God had shot His last bolt, He had no more that He could do. Christ being refused, the nation's

doom was fixed and sealed, and down came the eagles of Rome, again God's scavengers, to sweep away the nation on which had been lavished such wealth of Divine love, but which had now come to be a rotting abomination, and to this day remains a living death, a miraculously preserved monument of God's judgments.

Take another illustration how, once more, the executants fall under the power of the law. That power which crushed the feeble resources of Judæa as a giant might crush a mosquito in his grasp, in its turn became honeycombed with abominations and immoralities; and then down from the frozen North came the fierce Gothic tribes over the Roman territory. One of them called himself the "Scourge of God," and he was right. Another swooping down of the vultures flashes from the blue heavens, and the carrion is torn to fragments by their strong beaks.

Take one more illustration—that French Revolution at the end of the last century. The fathers sowed the wind, and the children reaped the whirlwind. Generations of heartless luxury, selfishness, carelessness of the cry of the poor, immoral separation of class from class, and all the sins which a ruling caste could commit against a subject people, had prepared for the convulsion. Then, in a carnival of blood and deluges of fire and sulphur, the rotten thing was swept off the face of the earth, and the world breathed more freely for its destruction.

Take another illustration, through which many of us have lived. The bitter legacy of negro slavery that England gave to her giant son across the Atlantic, which blasted and sucked the strength out of that great republic, went down amidst universal execration. It took centuries for the corpse to be ready, but when the vultures came they made quick work of it.

And so, as I say, all over the world, and from the

beginning of time, with delays according to the possibilities of restoration and recovery which the Divine eye discerns, this law is working. Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth. "The wheels of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding small." "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

And has the law exhausted its force? Are there going to be no more applications of it? Are there no European societies at this day that in their godlessness and social iniquities are hurrying fast to the condition of carrion? Look around us—drunkenness, sensual immorality, commercial dishonesty, senseless luxury amongst the rich, heartless indifference to the wail of the poor, godlessness over all classes and ranks of the community. Surely, surely, if the body politic be not dead it is sick nigh unto death. And I, for my part, have little hesitation in saying that as far as one can see, European society is driving as fast as it can, with its godlessness and immorality, to such another "day of the Lord" as these words of my text suggest. Let us see to it that we do our little part to be the salt of the earth which shall keep it from rotting, and so drive away the vultures of judgment.

II.—But let me turn to another point. We have here a law which shall have a far more tremendous accomplishment in the future.

There have been many comings of the Lord, many days of the Lord, when, as Isaiah says in his magnificent vision of one such, "the loftiness of man has been bowed down, and the haughtiness of man made low, and the Lord alone exalted in that day when He arises to shake terribly the earth."

And all these "days of the Lord" are prophecies, and distinctly point to a future "day," when the same principles which have been disclosed as working on a small

scale in them, shall be manifested in full embodiment. These "days of the Lord" proclaim "*the* day of the Lord." In the prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments that universal future judgment is seen glimmering through the descriptions of the nearer partial judgments. So interpreters are puzzled to say at what point in a prophecy the transition is made from the smaller to the greater. The prophecies are like the diagrams in treatises on perspective, in which diverging lines are drawn from the eye, enclosing a square or other figure, and which, as they recede further from the point of view, enclose a figure, the same in shape but of greater dimensions. There is a historical event foretold, the fall of Jerusalem. It is close up to the eyes of the disciples, and is comparatively small. Carry out the lines that touch its corners and define its shape, and upon the far distant curtain of the dim future there is thrown a like figure immensely larger, the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world. All these little premonitions and foretastes and anticipatory specimens point onwards to the assured termination of the world's history in that great and solemn day, when all men shall be gathered before Christ's throne, and He shall judge all nations—judge you and me amongst the rest. That future judgment is distinctly a part of the Christian revelation. Jesus Christ is to come in bodily form as He went away. All men are to be judged by Him. That judgment is to be the destruction of opposing forces, the sweeping away of the carrion of moral evil.

It is therefore distinctly a part of the message that is to be preached by us, under penalty of the awful condemnation pronounced on the watchman who seeth the sword coming and gives no warning. It is not becoming to make such a solemn message the opportunity for pictorial rhetoric, which vulgarises its greatness and weak-

ens its power. But it is worse than an offence against taste; it is unfaithfulness to the preaching which God bids us, treason to our King, and cruelty to our hearers, to suppress the warning—"the day of the Lord cometh." There are many temptations to put it in the background. Many of you do not want that kind of preaching. You want the gentle side of Divine revelation. You say to us in fact, though not in words, "Prophesy to us smooth things." Tell us about the infinite love which wraps all mankind in its embrace. Speak to us of the Father God, Who hateth nothing that He hath made. Magnify the mercy and gentleness and tenderness of Christ. Do not say anything about that other side. It is not in accordance with the tendencies of modern thought.

So much the worse, then, for the tendencies of modern thought. I yield to no man in the ardour of my belief that the centre of all revelation is the revelation of a God of infinite love, but I cannot forget that there is such a thing as "the terror of the Lord," and I dare not disguise my conviction that no preaching sounds every string in the manifold harp of God's truth, which does not strike that solemn note of warning of judgment to come.

Such suppression is unfaithfulness. Surely, if we preachers believe that tremendous truth, we are bound to speak. It is cruel kindness to be silent. If a traveller is about plunging into some gloomy jungle infested by wild beasts, he is a friend who sits by the wayside to warn him of his danger. Surely you would not call a signalman unfeeling because he held out a red lamp when he knew that just round the curve beyond his cabin, the rails were up, and that any train that reached the place would go over in horrid ruin. Surely that preaching is not justly charged with harshness which rings out the wholesome proclamation of a day of judgment, when we shall each give account of ourselves to the Divine-human Judge.

Such suppression weakens the power of the Gospel, which is the proclamation of deliverance, not only from the power, but also from the future retribution of sin. In such a maimed Gospel, there is but an enfeebled meaning given to that idea of deliverance. And though the thing that breaks the heart and draws men to God is not terror but love, the terror must often be evoked in order to lead to love. It is only "judgment to come" which will make Felix tremble, and though his trembling may pass away, and he be none the nearer the Kingdom, there will never any good be done to him, unless he does tremble.

So for all these reasons, all faithful preaching of Christ's Gospel must include the proclamation of Christ as Judge.

But, if I should be unfaithful, if I did not preach this truth, what shall we call you if you turn away from it? You would not think it a wise thing of the engine-driver to shut his eyes if the red lamp *were* shown, and to go along at full speed and to pay no heed to that. Do you think it would be right for a Christian minister to lock his lips and never say: "There is a judgment to come"? And do you think it is wise of you not to think of that, and to shape your conduct accordingly?

Oh, dear friends! I do not doubt that the centre of all Divine revelation is the love of God, nor do I doubt that incomparably the highest representation of the power of Christ's Gospel is that it draws men away from the love and the practice of evil, and makes them pure and holy. But that is not all. There is not only the practice and the power of sin to be fought against, but there is the penalty of sin to be taken into account; and as sure as you are living, and as sure as there is a God above us, so sure is it that there is a Day of Judgment, when He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained. The believing of that is not salvation, but the

belief of that seems to me to be indispensable for any vigorous grasp of the delivering love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III.—And so the last thing that I have to say is that this is a law which need never touch you, nor you know anything about but by the hearing of the ear.

It is told us that we may escape it. When Paul reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, his hearer trembled as he listened, but there was an end. But the true effect of this message is the effect that Paul himself attached to it when he said in the hearing of Athenian wisdom, "God hath commanded all men everywhere *to repent*, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness." Judgment faithfully preached is the preparation for preaching that—"there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." If we trust in that great Saviour, we shall be quickened from the death of sin, and so shall not be food for the vultures of judgment. Can these corpses live? Can this eating putrescence, which burrows its foul way through our souls, be sweetened? Is there any antiseptic for it? Yes, blessed be God, and the hand Whose touch healed the leper will heal us, and our flesh will come again as the flesh of a little child. Christ has bared His breast to the Divine judgments against sin, and if by faith we shelter ourselves in Him, we shall never know the terrors of that awful day.

Be sure that judgment to come is no mere figure dressed up to frighten children, nor the product of blind superstition, but it is the inevitable issue of the righteousness of the All-ruling God. You have to face it, I have to face it, and all the sons of men. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment." Betake yourselves, as poor sinful creatures who know something of the corruption of your

own hearts, to that dear Christ Who has died on the Cross for you, and all that is obnoxious to the Divine judgments will, by His transforming life breathed into you, be taken out of your hearts; and when that day of the Lord shall dawn, you, trusting in the sacrifice of Him who is your Judge, will "have a song as when a holy solemnity is kept." Take Christ for your Saviour, and then, when the vultures of judgment, with their mighty black pinions are wheeling and circling in the sky, ready to pounce upon their prey, He will gather you "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," and beneath their shadow you will be safe.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

SERMON X.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

"Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people."—GEN. XXV. 28.

"FULL of years" does not seem to me to be a mere synonym for longevity. That would be an intolerable tautology, for we should then have the same thing said three times over—"an old man," "in a good old age," "full of years." There must be some other idea than that in the expression. If you notice that the expression is by no means an usual one, that it is only applied to one or two of the Old Testament characters, and those selected characters, I think you will see that there must be some other significance in it than merely to point to length of days.

It may be well to note the instances. In addition to our text, we find it employed, first, in reference to Isaac, in GEN. XXXV. 29, where the words are repeated almost *verbatim*. That calm, contemplative life, so unlike the active, varied career of his father, also attained to this blessing at its close. Then we find that the stormy and adventurous course of the great king David, with its wonderful alternations both of moral character and of fortune, is represented as being closed at last with this

tranquil evening glory: "He died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour." Once more, we read of the great high priest Jehoiada, whose history had been crowded with peril, change, brave resistance, and strenuous effort, that with all the storms behind him he died at last "full of days." The only other instance of the occurrence of the phrase is at the close of the Book of Job, the typical record of the good man suffering, and of the abundant compensations given by a loving God. The fair picture of returning prosperity and family joy, like the calm morning sunshine after a night of storm and wreck, with which that wonderful Book ends, has this for its last touch, evidently intended to deepen the impression of peace which is breathed over it all. "So Job died, being old and full of days." These are all the instances of the occurrence of this phrase, and I think we may fairly say that in all it is meant to suggest not merely length of days, but some characteristic of the long life over and above its mere length. We shall, I think, understand its meaning a little better if we make a very slight and entirely warranted change, and instead of reading "*full* of years," read "*satisfied* with years." The men were satisfied with life; having exhausted its possibilities, having drunk a full draught, having nothing more left to wish for. The words point to a calm close, with all desires gratified, with hot wishes stilled, with no desperate clinging to life, but a willingness to let it go, because all which it could give had been attained.

So much for one of the remarkable expressions in this verse. There is another: "He was gathered to his people," of which we shall have more to say presently. Enough for the present to note the peculiarity, and to suggest that it seems to contain some dim hint of a future life, and some glimmer of some of the profoundest thoughts about it.

We have two main things to consider.

I.—The tranquil close of a life.

It is possible, then, at the end of life to feel that it has satisfied one's wishes. Whether it does or no will depend mostly on ourselves, and very slightly on our circumstances. Length of days, competence, health and friends are important; but neither these nor any other externals will make the difference between a life which, in the retrospect, will seem to have been sufficient for our desires, and one which leaves a hunger in the heart. It is possible for us to make our lives of such a sort, that whether they run on to the apparent maturity of old age, or whether they are cut short in the midst of our days, we may rise from the table feeling that it has satisfied our desires, met our anticipation, and been all very good.

Possibly, that is not the way in which most of us look at life. That is not the way in which a great many of us seem to think, that it is an eminent part of Christian and religious character to look at life. But it is the way in which the highest type of devotion and the truest goodness always look at it. There are people, old and young, who, whenever they look back, whether it be over a long tract of years or over a short one, have nothing to say about it except: "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit;" a retrospect of weary disappointments and thwarted plans.

How different with some of us the forward and the backward look! Are there not some listening to me, whose past is so dark that it flings black shadows over their future, and who can only cherish hopes for to-morrow, by giving the lie to and forgetting the whole of their yesterdays? It is hard to paint the regions before us like "the Garden of the Lord," when we know that the locusts of our own godless desires have made all the land behind us desolate. If your past has been a selfish

past, a godless past, in which passion, inclination, whim, anything but conscience and Christ have ruled, your remembrances can scarcely be tranquil; nor your hopes bright. If you have only "prospects drear," when you "backward cast your eye," it is not wonderful if "forwards though you cannot see," you will "guess and fear." Such lives, when they come towards an end, are wont to be full of querulous discontent, and bitterness. We have all seen godless old men cynical and sour, pleased with nothing, grumbling, or feebly complaining about everything, dissatisfied with all which life has thus far yielded them, and yet clinging desperately to it, and afraid to go.

Put by the side of such an end this calm picture of the old man going down into his grave, and looking back over all those long days since he came away from his father's house, and became a pilgrim and a stranger. How all the hot anxieties, desires, occupations of youth have quieted themselves down! How far away now seem the warlike days when he fought the barbarian kings! How far away the heaviness of heart when he journeyed to Mount Moriah with his boy, and whetted the knife to slay his son! His love had all been buried in Sarah's grave. He has been a lonely man for many years; and yet he looks, as God looked back over His creative week, and feels that all has been good. "It was all for the best; the great procession of my life has been ordered from the beginning to its end, by the hand that shapes beauty everywhere, and has made all things blessed and sweet. I have drunk a full draught; I have had enough; I bless the Giver of the feast, and push my chair back; and get up and go away." He died an old man, and satisfied with his life.

Ay! And what a contrast that makes, dear friends, to another set of people. There is nothing more miserable

than to see a man, as his years go by, gripping harder and tighter at this poor, fleeting world that is slipping away from him; nothing sadder than to see how, as opportunities and capacities for the enjoyment of life dwindle, and dwindle, and dwindle, people become almost fierce in the desire to keep it. Why, you can see on the face of many an old man and woman a hungry discontent, that has not come from the mere wrinkles of old age or care; an eager acquisitiveness looking out of the dim old eyes, tragical and awful. It is sad to see a man, as the world goes from him, grasping at its skirts as a beggar does at the retreating passer-by that refuses him an alms. Are there not some of us who feel that this is our case, that the less we have before us of life here on earth, the more eagerly we grasp at the little which still remains; trying to get some last drops out of the broken cistern which we know can hold no water? How different this blessed acquiescence in the fleeting away of the fleeting; and this contented satisfaction with the portion that has been given him, which this man had who died willingly, being satisfied with life!

Sometimes, too, there is satiety—weariness of life which is not satisfaction, though it looks like it. Its language is:—"Man delights me not; nor woman neither. I am tired of it all."—Those who feel thus sit at the table without an appetite. They think that they have seen to the bottom of everything, and they have found everything a cheat. They expect nothing new under the sun; that which is to be hath already been, and it is all vanity and striving after the wind. They are at once satiated and dissatisfied. Nothing keeps the power to charm.

How different from all this is the temper expressed in this text, rightly understood! Abraham had had a richly varied life. It had brought him all he wished. He has drunk a full draught, and needs no more. He is satisfied,

but that does not mean loss of interest in present duties, occupations or enjoyments. It is possible to keep ourselves fully alive to all these till the end, and to preserve something of the keen edge of youth even in old age, by the magic of communion with God, purity of conduct and a habitual contemplation of all events as sent by our Father. When Paul felt himself very near his end, he yet had interest enough in common things to tell Timothy all about their mutual friends' occupation, and to wish to have his books and parchments.

So, calmly, satisfied and yet not sickened, keenly appreciating all the good and pleasantness of life, and yet quite willing to let it go, Abraham died. So may it be with us too, if we will, no matter what the duration or the externals of our life. If we too are His children by faith, we shall be "blessed with faithful Abraham." And I beseech you to ask yourselves whether the course of your life is such as that if at this moment God's great knife were to come down and cut it in two, you would be able to say, "Well! I have had enough, and now contentedly I go."

Again, it is possible at the end of life to feel that it is complete, because the days have accomplished for us the highest purpose of life. Scaffoldings are for buildings, and the moments and days and years of our earthly lives are scaffolding. What are you building inside the scaffolding, brother? What kind of a structure will be disclosed when the scaffolding is knocked away. What is the end for which days and years are given? That they may give us what eternity cannot take away—a character built upon the love of God in Christ, and moulded into His likeness. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." Has your life helped you do that? If it has, though you be but a child, you are full of years; if it has not, though your hair be

whitened with the snows of the nineties, you are yet incomplete and immature. The great end of life is to make us like Christ, and pleasing to Christ. If life has done that for us we have got the best out of it, and our life is completed, whatever may be the number of the days. Quality, not quantity, is the thing that determines the perfectness of a life. And like as in northern lands, where there is only a week or two from the melting of the snow to the cutting of the hay, the whole harvest of a life may be gathered in a very little space, and all be done which is needed to make the life complete. Has your life this completeness? Can you be "satisfied" with it, because the river of the flowing hours has borne down some grains of gold amidst the mass of mud, and, notwithstanding many sins and failures, you have thus far fulfilled the end of your being, that you are in some measure trusting and serving the Lord Jesus Christ?

Again, it is possible, at the end of life, to be willing to go as satisfied.

Most men cling to life in grim desperation, like a man to a cliff giving way, or a drowning man clutching at any straw. How beautiful the contrast of the placid, tranquil acquiescence expressed in that phrase of our text! No doubt there will always be the shrinking of the bodily nature from death. But that may be overcome. There is no passion so weak but in some case it has "mated and mastered the fear of death," and it is possible for us all to come to that temper in which we shall be ready for either fortune, to live and serve Him here, or to die and enjoy Him yonder. Or, to return to an earlier illustration, it is possible to be like a man sitting at table, who has had his meal, and is quite contented to stay on there, restful and cheerful, but is not unwilling to put back his chair, to get up and to go away, thanking the Giver for what he has received.

Ah! that is the way to face the end, dear brethren, and how is it to be done? Such a temper need not be the exclusive possession of the old. It may belong to us at all stages of life. How is it won? By a life of devout communion with God. The secret of it lies in obeying the commandment and realising the truth which Abraham realised and obeyed: "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect." "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward." That is to say, a simple communion with God, realising His presence and feeling that He is near, will sweeten disappointment, will draw from it its hidden blessedness, will make us victors over its pains and its woes. Such a faith will make it possible to look back and see only blessing; to look forward and see a great light of hope burning in the darkness. Such a faith will check weariness, avert satiety, promote satisfaction, and will help us to feel that life and the great hereafter are but the outer and inner mansions of the Father's house, and death the short though dark corridor between. So we shall be ready for life or for death.

II.—Now I must turn to consider more briefly the glimpse of the joyful society beyond, which is given us in that other remarkable expression of our text: "he was gathered to his people."

That phrase is only used in the earlier Old Testament books, and there only in reference to a few persons. It is used of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron, and once (JUDGES ii. 10) of a whole generation. If you will weigh the words, I think you will see that there is in them a dim intimation of something beyond this present life.

"He was gathered to his people" is not the same thing as "He died," for, in the earlier part of the verse, we read, "Abraham gave up the ghost and died . . . and

was gathered to his people." It is not the same thing as being buried. For we read in the following verse: "And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Macpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre." It is then the equivalent neither of death nor of burial. It conveys dimly and veiledly that Abraham was buried, and yet that was not all that happened to him. He was buried, but also "he was gathered to his people." Why! his own "people" were buried in Mesopotamia, and his grave was far away from theirs. What is the meaning of the expression? Who were the people he was gathered to? In death or in burial, "the dust returns to the earth as it was." What was it that was gathered to his people?

Dimly, vaguely, veiledly, but unmistakably, as it seems to me, is here expressed at least a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham that was not there in what "his sons Isaac and Ishmael laid in the cave at Macpelah," but was somewhere else and was for ever. That is the first thing hinted at here—the continuance of the personal being after death.

Is there anything more? I think there is. Now, remember, Abraham's whole life was shaped by that commandment, "Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy kindred, and from thy country." He never dwelt with his kindred; all his days he was a pilgrim and a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land. And though he was living in the midst of a civilisation which possessed great cities whose walls reached to heaven, he pitched his tent beneath the terebinth tree at Mamre, and would have nothing to do with the order of things around him, but remained an exotic, a waif, an outcast in the midst of Canaan all his life. Why? Because he "looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God." And now he has gone to it, he is

gathered to his people. The life of isolation is over, the true social life is begun. He is no longer separated from those around him, or flung amidst those that are uncongenial to him. "He is gathered to his people;" he dwells with his own tribe; he is at home; he is in the city.

And so, brethren, life for every Christian man must be lonely. After all communion we dwell as upon islands, dotted over a great archipelago, each upon his little rock, with the sea dashing between us; but the time comes when, if our hearts are set upon that great Lord, whose presence makes us one, there shall be no more sea, and all the isolated rocks shall be parts of a great continent. Death sets the solitary in families. We are here like travellers plodding lonely through the night and the storm, but soon crossing the threshold into the lighted hall full of friends.

If we cultivate that sense of detachment from the present, and of having our true affinities in the unseen, if we dwell here as strangers because our citizenship is in heaven, then death will not drag us away from our associates, nor hunt us into a lonely land, but will bring us where closer bonds shall knit the "sweet societies" together, and the sheep shall couch close by one another because all gathered round the one shepherd. Then many a broken tie shall be re-woven, and the solitary wanderer meet again the dear ones whom he had "loved long since, and lost awhile."

Further, the expressions suggest that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. "He was gathered to his people," whom he was like and who were like him; the people with whom he had sympathy, the people whose lives were shaped after the fashion of his own.

Men will be sorted there. Gravitation will come into play undisturbed; and the pebbles will be ranged accord-

ing to their weights on the great shore where the sea has cast them up, as they are upon Chesil beach, down there in the English Channel, and many another coast besides; all the big ones together and sized off to the smaller ones, regularly and steadily laid out. Like draws to like. Our spiritual affinities, our religious and moral character, will settle where we shall be and who our companions will be when we get yonder. Some of us would not altogether like to live with the people that are like ourselves, and some of us would not find the result of this sorting to be very delightful. Men in the Dantesque circles were only made more miserable because all around them were of the same sort, and some of them worse than themselves. And an ordered hell, with no company for the liar but liars, and none for the thief but thieves, and none for impure men but the impure, and none for the godless but the godless, would be a hell indeed.

"He was gathered to his people," and you and I will be gathered likewise. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Let us follow with our thoughts, and in our lives those who have gone into the light, and cultivate in heart and character those graces and excellences which are congruous with the inheritance of the saints in light. Above all let us give our hearts to Christ, by simple faith in Him, to be shaped and sanctified by Him. Then our country will be where He is, and our people will be the people in whom His love abides, and the tribe to which we belong will be the tribe of which He is Chieftain. So when our turn comes, we may rise thankfully from the table in the wilderness, which He has spread for us, having eaten as much as we desired, and quietly follow the dark-robed messenger whom His love sends to bring us to the happy multitudes that throng the streets of the city. There we shall find our true home, our kindred, our King. "So shall *we* ever be with the Lord."

THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE.

SERMON XI

THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."—JOHN xx. 30, 31.

IT is evident that these words were originally the close of this Gospel, the following chapter being an appendix, subsequently added by the writer himself. In them we have the Evangelist's own acknowledgment of the incompleteness of his Gospel, and his own statement of the purpose which he had in view in composing it. That purpose was distinctly a doctrinal one, and he tells us that in carrying it out he omitted many things that he could have put in if he had chosen. But that doctrinal purpose was subordinate to a still further aim. His object was not only to present the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, but to present it in such a way as to induce his readers to believe in that Christ. And he desired that they might have faith in order that they might have life.

Now, it is a very good old canon in judging of a book that "in every work" we are to "regard the writer's end," and if that simple principle had been applied to this

Gospel, a great many of the features in it which have led to some difficulty would have been seen to be naturally explained by the purpose which the Evangelist had in view.

But this text may be applied very much more widely than to John's Gospel. We may use it, to point our thoughts to the strange silences and incompletenesses of the whole of Revelation, and to the explanation of these incompletenesses by the consideration of the purpose which it all had in view. In that sense I desire to look at these words before us.

I.—First, then, we have here set forth the incompleteness of Scripture.

Take this Gospel first. Anybody that looks at it can see that it is a fragment. It is not meant to be a biography; it is avowedly a selection, and a selection under the influence, as I shall have to show you presently, of a distinct dogmatic purpose. There is nothing in it about Christ's birth, nothing in it about His baptism, nor about His selection of His Apostles. There is scarcely anything about the facts of His outward life at all. There is scarcely a word about the whole of His ministry in Galilee. There is not one of His parables, there are only seven of His miracles before the Resurrection, and two of these occur also in the other Evangelists. There is scarcely any of His ethical teaching; there is not a word about the Lord's Supper.

And so I might go on enumerating many remarkable gaps in this Gospel. Nearly half of it is taken up with the incidents of one week at the end of His life, and the incidents of and after the Resurrection. Of the remainder—by far the larger portion consists of several conversations which are hung upon miracles that seem to be related principally for the sake of these. The whole of the phenomena show us at once the fragmentary character of this Gospel as stamped upon the very surface.

And when we turn to the other three, the same thing is true, though less strikingly so. Why was it that in the Church, after the completion of the Scriptural canon, there sprang up a whole host of apocryphal gospels, full of childish stories of events which people felt had been passed over with strange silence, in the teachings of the four Evangelists: stories of His childhood, for instance, and stories about what happened between His death and His resurrection? A great many miracles were added to those that we have told us in Scripture. The condensed hints of the canonical Gospels received a great expansion, which indicated how much their silence about certain points had been felt. What a tiny pamphlet they make! Is it not strange that the greatest event in the world's history should be told in such brief outline, and that here, too, the mustard seed, "less than the least of all seeds," should have become such a great tree? Put the four Gospels down by the side of the two thick octavo volumes, which it is the regulation thing to write nowadays, as the biography of any man that has a name at all, and you will feel their incompleteness as biographies. They are but a pen-and-ink drawing of the sun! And yet, although they be so tiny that you might sit down and read them all in an evening over the fire, is it not strange that they have stamped on the mind of the world an image so deep and so sharp, of such a character as the world never saw elsewhere? They are fragments, but they have left a symmetrical and an unique impression on the consciousness of the whole world.

And then, if you turn to the whole Book, the same thing is true, though in a modified sense there. I have no time to dwell upon that fruitful field, but the silence of Scripture is quite as eloquent as its speech. Think, for instance, of how many things in the Bible are taken for granted which one would not expect to be taken for

granted in a book of religious instruction. It takes for granted the Being of a God. It takes for granted our relations to Him. It takes for granted our moral nature. In its later portions, at all events, it takes for granted the future life. Look at how the Bible, as a whole, passes by, without one word of explanation or alleviation, a great many of the difficulties which gather round some of its teaching. For instance, we find no attempt to explain the Divine nature of our Lord; or the existence of the three Persons in the Godhead. It has not a word to say in explanation of the mystery of prayer; or of the difficulty of reconciling the Omnipotent will of God on the one hand, with my own free will on the other. It has not a word to explain, though many a word to proclaim and enforce, the fact of Christ's death as the atonement for the sins of the whole world. Observe, too, how scanty the information on points on which the heart craves for more light. How closely, for instance, the veil is kept over the future life! How many questions which are not prompted by mere curiosity, our sorrow and our love ask in vain!

Nor is the incompleteness of Scripture as a historical book less marked. Nations and men appear on its pages abruptly, rending the curtain of oblivion, and striding to the front of the stage for a moment, and then they disappear, swallowed up of night. It has no care to tell the stories of any of its heroes, except for so long as they were the organs of that Divine breath, which, breathed through the weakest reed, makes music. The self-revelation of God, not the acts and fortunes of even His noblest servants, is the theme of the Book. It is full of gaps about matters that any sciolist or philosopher or theologian would have filled up for it. There it stands, a Book unique in the world's history, unique in what it says, and no less unique in what it does not say.

"Many other things truly did" that Divine Spirit in its march through the ages, "which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe."

II.—And so that brings me next to say a word or two about the more immediate purpose which explains all these gaps and incompletenesses.

John's Gospel, and the other three Gospels, and the whole Bible, New Testament and Old, have this for their purpose, to produce in men's hearts the faith in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God.

I need not speak at length about this one Gospel with any special regard to that thought. I have already said that the Evangelist avows that his work is a selection, that he declares that the purpose that determined his selection was doctrinal, and that he picked out facts which would tend to represent Jesus Christ to us in the twofold capacity,—as the Christ, the Fulfiller of all the expectations and promises of the Old Covenant, and as the Son of God. The one of these titles is a name of office, the other a name of nature; the one declares that He had come to be, and to do, all to which types and prophecies and promises had dimly pointed, and the other declares that He was "the Eternal Word," which "in the beginning was with God and was God," and was manifest here upon earth to us.

This was his purpose, and this representation of Jesus Christ is that which shapes all the facts and all the phenomena of this Gospel, from the very first words of it to its close.

And so, although it is wide from my present subject, I may just make one parenthetical remark, to the effect that it is ridiculous in the face of this statement for "critics" to say, as some of them do: "The author of the fourth Gospel has not told us this, that, and the other incident in Christ's life, therefore, he did not know it." Then some of them will draw the conclusion that John's Gospel is not

to be trusted in the given case, because he does not give us a certain incident, and others might draw the conclusion that the other three Evangelists are not to be trusted because they do give it us. And the whole fabric is built up upon a blunder, and would have been avoided if people had listened when he said to them :—"I knew a great many things about Jesus Christ, but I did not put them down here because I was not writing a biography, but preaching a gospel ; and what I wanted to proclaim was that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

But now we may extend that a great deal further. It is just as true about the whole New Testament. The four Gospels are written to tell us these two facts about Christ. They are none of them merely biographies ; as such they are singularly deficient, as we have seen. But they are biographies plus a doctrine ; and the biography is told mainly for the sake of carrying this twofold truth into men's understandings and hearts, that Jesus is, first of all, the Christ, and second, the Son of God.

And then comes the rest of the New Testament, which is nothing more than the working out of the theoretical and practical consequence of these great truths. All the Epistles, the Book of Revelation, and the history of the Church, as embodied in the Acts of the Apostles,—all these are but the consequences of that fundamental truth : and the whole of Scripture in its later portions is but the drawing of the inferences and the presenting of the duties that flow from these facts that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

And what about the Old Testament ? Why, this about it : that whatever may be the conclusion as to the date and authorship of any of the books in it,—and I am not careful to contend about that at present ;—and whatever a man may believe about the verbal prophecies which most of us recognise there,—there is stamped unmistakably

upon the whole system, of which the Old Testament is the record, an onward-looking attitude. It is all anticipatory of "good things to come," and of a person who will bring them. Sacrifice, sacred offices, such as priesthood and kingship, and the whole history of Israel, have their faces turned to the future. "They that went before, and they that followed after, cried 'Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" That Christ towers up above the history of the world and the process of revelation, like Mount Everest among the Himalayas. To that great peak all the country on the one side runs upwards, and from it all the valleys on the other descend; and the springs are born there which carry verdure and life over the world.

Christ, the Son of God, is the centre of Scripture; and the Book—whatever be the historical facts about its origin, its authorship, and the date of the several portions of which it is composed—the Book is a unity, because there is driven right through it, like a core of gold, either in the way of prophecy and onward-looking anticipation, or in the way of history and grateful retrospect, the reference to the one "Name that is above every name," the name of the Christ the Son of God.

And all its incompleteness, its fragmentariness, its carelessness about persons, are intended, as are the slight parts in a skilful artist's handiwork, to emphasise the beauty and the sovereignty of that one central figure on which all lights are concentrated, and on which the painter has lavished all the resources of his art. So God—for *God* is the Author of the Bible—on this great canvas has painted much in sketchy outline, and left much unfilled in, that every eye may be fixed on the central Figure, the Christ of God, on Whose head comes down the dove, and round Whom echoes the Divine declaration: "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

But it is not merely in order to represent Jesus as the Christ of God that these things are written, but it is that that representation may become the object of our faith. If the intention of Scripture had been simply to establish the fact that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, it might have been done in a very different fashion. A theological treatise would have been enough to do that. But, if the object be that men should not only accept with their understandings the truth concerning Christ's office and nature, but that their hearts should go out to Him, and that they should rest their sinful souls upon Him *as* the Son of God and the Christ, then there is no other way to accomplish that, but by the history of His life and the manifestation of His heart. If the object were simply to make us know about Christ, we do not need a Book like this; but if the object is to lead us to put our faith in Him, then we must have what we have here, the infinitely touching and tender figure of Jesus Christ Himself, set before us in all its sweetness and beauty as He lived and moved and died for us.

And so, dear friends, let me put one last word here about this part of my subject. If this be the purpose of Scripture, then let us learn on the one hand the wretched insufficiency of a mere orthodox creed, and let us learn on the other hand the equal insufficiency of a mere creedless emotion.

If the purpose of Scripture, in these Gospels, and all its parts, is that we should believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," that purpose is not accomplished when we simply yield our understanding to that truth and accept it as a great many people do. That was much more the fault of the last generation than of this, though many of us may still make the mistake of supposing that we are Christians because we idly assent to—or, at least, do not deny, and so fancy that we accept—Christian

truth. But, as Luther says in one of his rough figures, "Human nature is like a drunken peasant; if you put him up on the horse on the one side, he is sure to tumble down on the other." And so the reaction from the heartless, unpractical orthodoxy of half a century ago has come with a vengeance to-day, when everybody is saying, "Oh! give me a Christianity without dogma!" Well, I say that too, about a great many of the metaphysical subtleties which have been called Doctrinal Christianity. But this doctrine of the nature and office of Jesus Christ cannot be given up, and the Christianity which Christ and His Apostles taught retained. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you trust your soul to Him in these characters? If you do, I think we can shake hands. If you do not, Scripture has failed to do its work on you, and you have not reached the point which all God's lavish revelation has been expended on the world that you and all men might attain.

III.—Now, lastly, notice the ultimate purpose of the whole.

Scripture is not given to us merely to make us know something about God in Christ, nor only in order that we may have faith in the Christ thus revealed to us, but for a further end—great, glorious, but, blessed be His Name! not distant—namely, that we may "have life in His name." "Life" is deep, mystical, inexplicable by any other words than itself. It includes pardon, holiness, well-being, immortality, Heaven; but it is more than they all.

This life comes into our dead hearts and quickens them by union with God. That which is joined to God lives. Each being according to its nature, is, on condition of the Divine power acting upon it. This bit of wood upon which I put my hand, and the hand which I put upon it, would equally crumble into nothingness if they were separated from God.

You can separate your wills and your spiritual nature from Him, and thus separated you are "dead in trespasses and in sins." And, oh! brother, the message comes to you: there is life in that great Christ, "in His name"; that is to say, in that revealed character of His by which He is made known to us as the Christ and the Son of God.

Union with Him in His Sonship, will bring life into dead hearts. He is the true Prometheus who has come from Heaven with fire, the fire of the Divine Life in the reed of His humanity, and He imparts it to us all if we will. He lays Himself upon us, as the prophet laid himself on the little child in the upper chamber; and lip to lip, and beating heart to dead heart, He touches our death, and it is quickened into life.

The condition on which that great Name will bring to us life is simply our faith. Do you believe in Him, and trust yourself to Him, as He who came to fulfil all that prophet, priest, and king, sacrifice, altar, and temple of old times prophesied and looked for? Do you trust in Him as the Son of God Who comes down to earth that we in Him might find the immortal life which He is ready to give? If you do, then, dear brethren, the end that God has in view in all His revelation, that Christ had in view in His bitter Passion, has been accomplished for you. If you do not it has not. You may admire Him, you may think loftily of Him, you may be ready to call Him by many great and appreciative names, but oh! unless you have learned to see in Him the Divine Saviour of your souls, you have not seen what God means you to see.

But if you have, then all other questions about this Book, important as they are in their places, may settle themselves as they will; you have got the kernel, the thing that it was meant to bring you. Many an erudite scholar, who has studied the Bible all his life, has missed the purpose for which it was given; and many a poor old

woman in her garret has found it. It is not meant to wrangle over, it is not meant to be read as an interesting product of the religious consciousness, it is not to be admired as all that remains of the literature of a nation that had a genius for religion; but it is to be taken as being God's great Word to the world, the record of the revelation that He has given us in His Son. The Eternal Word is the theme of all the written Word. Have you made the jewel which is brought us in that casket your own? Is Jesus to you the Son of the living God, believing on Whom you share His life, and become sons of God by Him? Can you take on to your thankful lips that triumphant and rapturous confession of the doubting Thomas—the flag flying on the completed roof-tree of this Gospel—"My Lord and my God"? If you can you will receive the blessing which Christ then promised to all of us standing beyond the limits of that little group, "who have not seen and yet have believed"—even that eternal life which flows into our dead spirits from the Christ, the Son of God. Who is the Light of the world, and the Life of men.

ITTAI OF GATH.

SERMON XII.

ITTAI OF GATH.

"And Ittai answered the king, and said: As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."—2 SAM. xv. 21.

IT was the darkest hour in David's life. No more pathetic page is found in the Old Testament than that which tells the story of his flight before Absalom. He is crushed by the consciousness that his punishment is deserved—the bitter fruit of the sin that filled all his later life with darkness. His courage and his buoyancy have left him. He has no spirit to make a stand or strike a blow. If Shimei runs along the hillside abreast of him, shrieking curses as he goes, all he says is: "Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."

So, heartbroken and spiritless, he leaves Jerusalem. And as soon as he has got clear of the city he calls a halt, in order that he may muster his followers and see on whom he may depend. Foremost among the little band come six hundred men from Gath—Philistines—from Goliath's city. These men, singularly enough, the king had chosen as his body-guard; perhaps he was not altogether sure of the loyalty of his own subjects, and possibly felt safer with foreign mercenaries, who could

have no secret leanings to the deposed house of Saul. Be that as it may, the narrative tells us that these men had "come after him from Gath." He had been there twice in the old days, in his flight from Saul, and the second visit had extended over something more than a year. Probably during that period his personal attraction, and his reputation as a brilliant leader, had led these rough soldiers to attach themselves to his service, and to be ready to forsake home and kindred in order to fight beside him.

At all events here they are, "faithful among the faithless" as foreign soldiers surrounding a king often are; —notably, for instance, the Swiss guard in the French Revolution. Their strong arms might have been of great use to David, but his generosity cannot think of involving them in his fall, and so he says to them. "I am not going to fight; I have no plan. I am going where I can. You go back and 'worship the rising sun.' Absalom will take you and be glad of your help. And as for me, I thank you for your past loyalty. Mercy and peace be with you!"

It is a beautiful nature that in the depth of sorrow shrinks from dragging other people down with itself. Generosity breeds generosity, and this Philistine captain breaks out into a burst of passionate devotion, garnished, in soldier-fashion, with an unnecessary oath or two, but ringing very sincere and meaning a great deal. As for himself and his men, they have chosen their side. Whoever goes, they stay. Whatever befalls, they stick by David; and if the worst come to the worst they can all die together, and their corpses lie in firm ranks round about their dead king. David's heart is touched and warmed by their outspoken loyalty; he yields and accepts their service. Ittai and his noble six hundred tramp on, out of our sight, and all their households behind them. Now what is there, in all that, to make a sermon out of?

I.—First, look at the picture of that Philistine soldier, as teaching us what grand passionate self-sacrifice may be evolved out of the roughest natures.

Analyse his words, and do you not hear, ringing in them, these three things, which are the seed of all nobility and splendour in human character? First, a passionate personal attachment; then, that love, issuing as such love always does, in willing sacrifice that recks not for a moment of personal consequences; that is ready to accept anything for itself if it can serve the object of its devotion, and will count life well expended if it is flung away in such a service. And we see, lastly, in these words a supreme restful delight in the presence of him whom the heart loves. For Ittai and his men, the one thing needful was to be beside him in whose eye they had lived, from whose presence they had caught inspiration; their trusted leader, before whom their souls bowed down. So then his vehement speech is the pure language of love.

Now these three things,—a passionate personal attachment, issuing in spontaneous heroism of self-abandonment, and in supreme satisfaction in the beloved presence,—may spring up in the rudest, roughest nature. A Philistine soldier was not a very likely man in whom to find refined and lofty emotion. He was hard by nature, hardened by his rough trade; and unconscious that he was doing anything at all heroic or great. Something had smitten this rock, and out of it there came the pure refreshing stream. And so I say to you, the weakest and the lowest, the roughest and the hardest, the most selfishly absorbed man and woman among us, has lying in him and her, dormant capacities for flaming up into such a splendour of devotion and magnificence of heroic self-sacrifice as is represented in these words of my text. A mother will do it for her child, and never think that she has done anything extraordinary; husbands will do such

things for wives ; wives for husbands ; friends and lovers for one another. All who know the sweetness and power of the bond of affection know that there is nothing more gladsome than to fling one's self away for the sake of those whom we love. And the capacity for such love and sacrifice lies in all of us ; prosaic, commonplace people as we are, with no great field on which to work out our heroisms ; yet it is in us to love and give ourselves away thus if once the heart be stirred.

And lastly, this capacity which lies dormant in all of us, if once it is roused to action will make a man blessed and dignified as nothing else will. The joy of unselfish love is the purest joy that man can taste ; the joy of perfect self-sacrifice is the highest joy that humanity can possess, and they lie open for us all.

And wherever, in some humble measure, these emotions of which I have been speaking are realised, there you get weakness springing up into strength, and the ignoble into loftiness. Astronomers tell us that, sometimes, a star that has shone inconspicuous, and stood low down in their catalogues as of fifth or sixth magnitude, will all at once flame out, having kindled and caught fire somehow, and will blaze in the heavens, outshining Jupiter and Venus. And so some poor, vulgar, narrow nature, touched by this Promethean fire of pure love that leads to perfect sacrifice, will "flame in the forehead of the morning sky," an undying splendour, and a light for ever more.

Brethren ! My appeal to you is a very plain and simple one, founded on these facts :—You have all that capacity in you, and you are all responible for the use of it. What have you done with it ? Is there any person or thing in this world that has ever been able to lift you up out of your miserable selves ? Is there any magnet that has proved strong enough to raise you from the low levels

along which your life creeps? Have you ever known the thrill of resolving to become the bondservant and the slave of some great cause not your own? Or are you, as so many of you are, like spiders living in the midst of your web, mainly intent upon what you can catch in it? You have these capacities slumbering in you. Have you ever set a light to that inert mass of enthusiasm that lies in you? Have you ever woke up the sleeper? Look at this rough soldier of my text, and learn from him the lesson that there is nothing that so ennobles and dignifies a commonplace nature as enthusiasm for a great cause, or self-sacrificing love for a worthy heart.

II.—The second remark which I make is this:—These possibilities of love and sacrifice point plainly to God in Christ as their true object. "Whose image and superscription hath it?" said Christ, looking at the Roman *denarius* that they brought and laid on His palm. If the Emperor's head is on it, why, then, *he* has a right to it as tribute. And then He went on to say, "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." So there are things that have God's image and superscription stamped on them, and such are our hearts, our whole constitution and nature. As plainly as the penny had the head of Augustus on it, and therefore proclaimed that he was Emperor where it was current, so plainly does every soul carry in the image of God, the witness that He is its owner and that it should be rendered in tribute to Him.

And amongst all these marks of a Divine possession and a Divine destination printed upon human nature, it seems to me that none are plainer than this fact, that we can all of us thus give ourselves away in the abandonment of a profound and all surrendering-love. That capacity unmistakably proclaims that it is destined to be directed towards God and to find its rest in Him. As distinctly as

some silver cup, with its owner's initials and arms engraved upon it, declares itself to be "meet for the master's use," so distinctly does your soul, by reason of this capacity, proclaim that it is meant to be turned to Him in Whom alone all love can find its perfect satisfaction; for Whom alone it is supremely blessed and great to shed life itself: and Who only has the authority over our human spirits.

We are made with hearts that need to rest upon an absolute love; we are made with understandings that need to grasp a pure, a perfect, and, as I believe, paradoxical though it may sound, a personal Truth. We are made with wills that crave for an absolute authoritative command, and we are made with a moral nature that needs a perfect holiness. And we need all that love, truth, authority, purity, to be gathered into one, for the misery of the world is that when we set out to look for treasures we have to go into many lands and to many merchants to buy many goodly pearls. But we need One of great price, in which all our wealth may be invested. We need that One to be an undying and perpetual possession. There is One to Whom our love can ever cleave, and fear none of the sorrows or imperfections that make earthward-turned love a rose with many a thorn, One for Whom it is pure gain to lose ourselves, One Who is plainly the only worthy recipient of the whole love and self-surrender of the heart.

That One is God, revealed and brought near to us in Jesus Christ. In that great Saviour we have a love at once Divine and human, we have the great transcendent instance of love leading to sacrifice. On that love and sacrifice for us Christ builds His claim on us for our hearts, and our all. Life alone can communicate life; it is only light that can diffuse light. It is only love that can kindle love; it is only sacrifice that can inspire sacrifice. And so He comes to us, and asks that we should

just love Him back again as He has loved us. He first gives Himself utterly for and to us, and then asks us to give ourselves wholly to Him. He first yields up His own life, and then He says : "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." The object, the true object for all this depth of love which lies slumbering in our hearts, is God in Christ, the Christ that died for us.

III.—And now, lastly, observe that the terrible misdirection of these capacities is the sin and the misery of the world.

I will not say that such emotions, even when expended on creatures, are ever wasted. For however unworthy may be the objects on which they are lavished, the man himself is the better and the higher for having cherished them. The mother, when she forgets self in her child, though her love and self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice may, in some respects, be called but an animal instinct, is elevated and ennobled by the exercise of them. The patriot and the thinker, the philanthropist, ay! even—although I take him to be the lowest of the scale—the soldier who, in some cause which he thinks to be a good one, and not merely in the tigerish madness of the battlefield, throws away his life—are lifted in the scale of being by their self-abnegation.

And so I am not going to say that when men love each other passionately and deeply, and sacrifice themselves for one another, or for some cause or purpose affecting only temporal matters, the precious elixir of love is wasted. God forbid! But I do say that all these objects, sweet and gracious as some of them are, ennobling and elevating as some of them are, if they are taken apart from God, are insufficient to fill your hearts : and that if they are slipped in between you and God, as they often are, then they birng sin and sorrow.

There is nothing more tragic in this world than the

misdirection of man's capacity for love and sacrifice. It is like the old story in the Book of Daniel, which tells how the heathen monarch made a great feast, and when the wine began to inflame the guests, sent for the sacred vessels taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, that had been used for Jehovah's worship; and (as the narrative says, with a kind of shudder at the profanation), "They brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the House of God, which was at Jerusalem, and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine and praised the gods." So this heart of mine, which, as I said, has the Master's initials and His arms engraven upon it, in token that it is His cup, I too often fill with the poisonous and intoxicating draught of earthly pleasure and earthly affections; and as I drink it, the madness goes through my veins, and I praise gods of my own making instead of Him Whom alone I ought to love.

Ah! brethren, we should be our own rebukes in this matter, and the heroism of the world should put to shame the cowardice and the selfishness of the Church. Contrast the depth of your affection for your household with the tepidity of your love for your Saviour. Contrast the willingness with which you sacrifice yourself for some dear one with the grudgingness with which you yield yourselves to Him. Contrast the rest and the sense of satisfaction in the presence of those you love, and your desolation when they are absent, with the indifference whether you have Christ beside you or not. And remember that the measure of your power of loving is the measure of your obligation to love your Lord; and that if you are all frost to Him and all fervour to them, then in a very solemn sense "a man's foes shall be they of his own household." "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me!"

And so let me gather all that I have been saying into the one earnest beseeching of you that you would bring that power of uncalculating love and self-sacrificing affection which is in you, and would fasten it where it ought to fix—on Christ who died on the cross for you. Such a love will bring blessedness to you. Such a love will ennoble and dignify your whole nature, and make you a far greater and fairer man or woman than you otherwise ever could be. Like some little bit of black carbon put into an electric current, my poor nature will flame into beauty and radiance when that spark touches it. So love Him and be at peace; give yourselves to Him and He will give you back yourselves, ennobled and transfigured by the surrender. Lay yourselves on His altar, and that altar will sanctify both the giver and the gift. If you can take this rough Philistine soldier's words in their spirit, and in a higher sense, say, "Whether I live I live unto the Lord, or whether I die I die unto the Lord; living or dying, I am the Lord's," He will let you enlist in His army; and give you for your marching orders this command and this hope, "If any man serve Me let him follow Me; and where I am there shall also My servant be."

TWO BUILDERS ON ONE FOUNDATION.

SERMON XIII.

TWO BUILDERS ON ONE FOUNDATION.

'If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. —1 Cor. iii. 14, 15.

THE vivid imagination of the Apostle puts before us here a very solemn truth in a picturesque form. Two workmen are building side by side. One builds a palace, the other a hovel. The materials which one uses are gold and silver, for decoration; and for solidity costly stones,—by which is not meant diamonds and emeralds and the like, but valuable building material, such as marbles and granites and alabaster. The other employs timber, dry reeds, straw. No doubt in Corinth, as in all ancient cities, side by side with the temples shining in marble and Corinthian brass, were the huts of the poor and of slaves built of such flimsy materials as these. Suddenly there plays around both buildings a great fire, the fire of the Lord coming to judgment. The marbles gleam the whiter, and the gold and the silver flash the more resplendently, whilst the tongues of light leap about them; but the straw hovel goes up in a flare! The one man gets wages for work that lasts, the other man gets no pay for what perishes. He is dragged through the smoke, saved by a hair's breadth,

but sees all his toil lying there in white ashes at his feet. It is a grim picture. Let us try and find out the meaning of it, and apply it to ourselves.

I.—First, the two builders and their work.

The original application of these words is distinctly to Christian teachers. The whole section starts from a rebuke of the party spirit in the Corinthian Church which led them to swear by Paul or Peter or Apollos, and to despise all teachers but their own favourite. The Apostle reminds these jangling partisans that all teachers were but instruments in God's hands, Who was the true Worker, the true Husbandman, the true Builder. That word opens up a whole region of thought to his ardent mind. He goes on to speak of the foundation which God has laid, namely, the mission of Jesus Christ. That foundation laid once for all in actual reality, in the historical facts of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection, had been laid in preaching by Paul when he founded the Corinthian Church. There cannot be two foundations. So all other teachers at Corinth have only to build on that foundation, that is, to carry on a course of Christian teaching which rests upon that fundamental truth. Let all such teachers take heed what sort of materials they build on that foundation, that is to say, what sort of teaching they offer, for there may be gold, and silver, and precious stones—solid and valuable instruction; or there may be timber, and hay, and straw—worthless and unsubstantial teaching. The materials with which the teachers build are evidently the instruction which they give, or the doctrines which they teach.

Hence the wood, hay, stubble are clearly not heresies, for the builder who uses them is on the foundation; and if Paul had been thinking of actual heresies, he would have found sharper words of condemnation with which to stigmatise them than those which merely designate them

as flimsy and unsubstantial. But what is meant is the unprofitable teaching which good men may present, when

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

While, on the other, the "gold and silver and precious stones" are the solid and permanent and soul-satisfying truths which are revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Now it is no part of my business to condemn this, that, and the other kind of teaching, but I will tell you what is evidently wood and hay and stubble. Misplaced learning; misplaced speculation; misplaced eloquence; sham philosophy; preaching one's self; talking about temporary, trivial things; dealing with the externals of Christianity, its ceremonial and its ritual; dealing with the morals of Christianity apart from that one motive of love to a dying Saviour which makes morality a reality in human life. All that kind of Christian teaching, remote from daily life and from men's deepest needs, however it may be admired, and thought to be "eloquent," "original," and "on a level with the growing culture of the age," and so on, is flimsy stuff to build upon the foundation of a crucified Saviour. There is no solidity in such work. It will not stand the stress of a gale of wind while it is being built, nor keep out the weather for those who house in it, and it will blaze at last like a thatched roof when "that day" puts a match to it. The solid teaching is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and of the great salvation which He has brought. On that rock-fact we calmly repose. In that great truth are wrapped up, as the plant in the seed, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If a Christian teacher will cleave to his Master, and ever ponder the meaning of His life and person, of His passion and glory, he will find them opening out into depths of truth, and far-reaching laws of conduct which will supply him with lessons of weight and worth, that will outshine all the glare of

tinsel novelties, and outlast the brief duration of the hay and stubble.

So, let all of us who are preachers—whether in the conventional and professional sense, or in the wider and truer sense in which every Christian should be a preacher, or who, in any way, have to communicate religious instruction—take the warning, that good men, well-meaning men, wishing to do good, building on the foundation, may, if they do not take care, be building with rubbish instead of with the immortal and indestructible truths of God's Word; and let me beseech you, as I would warn and exhort myself, to see to it that we do not carry chaff in our seed-baskets, but only the winnowed and the pure seed of the Word of God.

But the principle involved in this may very well be extended to the whole Christian life. The life of a Christian man is represented in Scripture, in many places, under the metaphor of a building; suggesting not only the idea of the whole life as resting upon Christ as the foundation, but also suggesting the thought of slow, continuous progress, stone by stone, layer by layer, and in addition implying that the result is a homogeneous whole. It is possible for two men, both of them being Christians, to be building two very different structures in their lives. The Apostle takes two extreme cases for the sake of illustrating his principle. Just as a mathematician takes a perfect triangle or a perfect circle, which does not exist in nature, for the purpose of working his problems, so the Apostle supposes two cases which cannot exist in fact—the one that of a man who builds with nothing but precious materials, and the other that of a man who builds with nothing but trash.

But although these two cases cannot exist in their perfect form, we know only too well by our own experience, and by observation of the life of the average Christian,

that many a true follower of Jesus Christ may pile much upon the foundation which is unworthy of it. We too often perpetrate the most grotesque inconsistencies in building up the structure of our lives. We lay one course of precious stones and the next of reeds ; one of silver and the next of timber. As you may see in the wretched huts in which wandering Arabs house amongst the ruins of some historical city, that half a man's house shall be of fluted marble and the other half shall be of crumbling clay, so, alas ! many Christian men and women are building their lives. With what are you building ? and what are you building ? A palace, a temple, a shop, a place of sinful amusement, a prison—which ? We build inconsistently, and in our own persons combine these two builders. And my message to you now is to beseech you to look for yourselves into your building ; and to see how much, and what, of it is likely to last, and how much of it is sure to be burned up when the fire comes.

II.—And now, secondly, let me ask you to think of the twofold effects of the one fire.

The flame plays round both the buildings. What fire is it ? The text answers the questions for us, "the day shall declare it." The Apostle does not think that he needs to say what day. They know well enough what day he means. To him and to them there is one day so conspicuou sand so often in their thoughts, that there is no need to name it more particularly. *The* day is the day when Christ shall come. And the fire is but the symbol that always attends the Divine appearance in the Old and in the New Testament. Thus, for instance, we have the adumbration of the final judgment in one of the Psalms, in which God calls Heaven and earth to be assessors of His judgment of His people, and there we read "a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him." The symbol of the fire is but the

expression for the searching, revealing, testing, destructive energy which comes with Christ when He comes to judge the world. That fire reveals, and it tests. What abides the test is glorified thereby ; what does not is burned up and annihilated. When Christ comes to judge, light comes with Him, and the light pours in upon the actions of men, and reveals them for what they are. The builders have been working, if I may say so, as you see builders sometimes nowadays, under special circumstances, and in great buildings, working night-work, with some more or less sufficient illumination. The day dawns, and the building at which they have been toiling in the dim light stands out disclosed in all its beauty or deformity. Its true proportions are manifest at last.

And how many surprises there will be—both among the workers whose work abides, and amongst those whose work perishes ! Many a man who thought that he was building gold and silver and precious stones will find out that he was pleasing himself, and not preaching his Master ; that he was talking about trivial, transitory things, and not about eternal truths that nourish and save men's souls. Many a preacher on whose words crowds have hung, and whose name has been the symbol for eloquence and power, in that day will look on what he built, and see that it is all naught, wood and hay and stubble, according to that solemn word, "Lord ! Lord ! have we not prophesied in Thy name ? And He shall say unto them, I never knew you !" Many an humble and timid builder who did not know what he was doing will see that he has built gold and silver and precious stones, according to that blessed word, "Lord ! when saw we Thee . . . . in prison and visited Thee ? And He shall answer, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me !" One of the most precious diamonds in Europe, that blazes now in a king's crown, lay on a stall in a

piazza at Rome for months, labelled, "Rock crystal, price one franc." And many of the most precious and noble deeds that ever were done on earth have been passed unrecognised by the crowd that beheld them, and forgotten except by Him.

So, dear friends, let us try to build for Christ, on Him and with Him, and we may leave the revelations of the future to the future; sure that He will never forget any of our works.

Not only is there this revealing process suggested, but the one class of service, of teaching, and of life is brightened and beautified and glorified by the fire, and the other is destroyed and burned up. The gold and silver and costly stones are glorified because revealed, and heightened in beauty by being brought into contact with Christ Himself, as a fair jewel is fairer for its setting, and flashes in the sunshine. And, on the other side, how much of all our lives will be sunken out of existence, crushed into nonentity, made as if it had never been at all, by the simple revelation of Jesus Christ! Of course, in so far as the outward body of our deeds is concerned, all our works, good or bad, are ended in that day; and so far as the results on character and fate are concerned, all the work of every man, be it good or bad, lives on for ever. But whilst these things are both true, there is a very real sense in which, whatever in our conduct is acceptable to Him, our Judge, will last—in His approving knowledge, in blessed results to ourselves the doers, and, because it is in accordance with that Divine Will which is the only permanent reality in the universe, will "abide for ever," as He does. It is also true that all our actions which have not in them the life-giving spirit of a loving obedience to a loving Christ, will, when the pure light of judgment falls on them, shrivel up like some unclean fungus in the sunshine, and be as they

had never been, except only for the pain that their perishing will give and the ugly void which their annihilation will leave in the edifice of our lives. Suppose that process were anticipated, and there could come to you to-day a power which would sweep out of your consciousness, and out of the fabric of your lives, all which that Day will annihilate,—what a poor, unconnected huddle of confusion and broken fragments your life would be! It would be like a house after bombardment, with great gaps in the walls where a shell had burst, and the whole tottering to fall. It would be like a sail in a man-of-war riddled with shot, and scarcely enough of it left to hang together. There are inconsistent Christians in this congregation to-day, I have no doubt, whose years might be reduced, as it were, into moments, if all the deeds which were no better than straw and wood were deducted. Test yourselves as far as you can before that time comes, and see how much of to-day, how much of yesterday, how much of yourself would survive if that flashing light were to come now. The selfish deeds, the God-forgetting deeds, the lust, the greed, will all vanish and go up in foul-smelling smoke. And what is left will be the gold and silver and precious stones; all holy desires, and self-sacrificing service, and devout aspirations, and pure Christ-like character.

"Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust."

III.—And now, lastly, look at the twofold effects on the builders.

The one gets a reward, the other suffers the loss of all his toil; gets no wages for work that did not last, is dragged through the fire and the smoke, and, just saved from being burned up, he stands there, amazed and impoverished, amidst the ruins of his home.

They are both Christians, remember that! They are

both on the foundation : that is not to be forgotten. The one of them gets the consequences of his services. We do not need to shrink from admitting the idea of a reward, the wages that are paid for what a man has done. Christ perpetually speaks to us about Heaven as being, in a very deep sense, a reward. And so does the whole of the New Testament, not because men deserve any Heaven at all, but because the Heaven which they do not deserve, and which they get only by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through faith in Him, is given in the measure of their capacity, which depends on their character, and is largely determined by their habitual conduct.

And so whilst, on the one hand, the foundation of all our hope of Heaven is "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us," on the other hand, if we will take the whole scope of the Christian teaching of the future life, the notion of faithfulness rewarded by corresponding crowns is distinctly a part of it. Consequently, unfaithfulness receives a less reward and a starless crown ; and a man who, in his deepest heart, may be a Christian, and who is thus, and so far, building upon the foundation, may live so inconsistently, and so forget his obligations and the character that he ought to sustain, that before that revealing fire all but his whole life may be burned up, and he himself only saved by being dragged, as it were, through the flame.

One looks around upon Christian people, one looks into one's own heart, and one feels that the solemn picture of my text will apply to a great many professing Christians. How much of all our lives will be burned up then ! For how much of it we shall not get any wages, because it will have ceased to exist ! And yet—and yet—though our inconsistencies be so many, let us not despair. It is possible, after all our imperfections, that we may yet be resting upon that foundation ; and if so we shall lose a great

deal, but we shall not lose ourselves. The inconsistent Christian's inconsistencies shall be burned up. Thank God for that assurance! What better could happen to them or for him than that they should be destroyed and he set free from them? Such a saying is a promise and a gospel, quite as much as a threatening. Instead of the hovels, he may build a palace. The fire of London finished the plague of London, and statelier streets and solid stone buildings took the place of the fetid alleys and tumble-down houses that were burned. But still that imperfect Christian "shall suffer loss"—the loss of what he might have gained. He shall lose the difference between the ten cities over which some rule, and the far smaller territory over which he is able to exercise authority. He shall lose remembrances which are true wealth. He shall lose, in that he will stand further from the Lord, and possess, because he can contain, less of His glory.

The two men are both Christians. They have both built on the foundation, whether in the true sense of the text we take thatas meaning teaching, or, in the wider reference which may be fairly given to the words, we take it as meaning life. The one has builded imperishable work of solid materials, which the merciful Judge accepts and rewards, for, blessed be His name, our deeds do not need to be perfect in order to please Him and win His smile. The other comes all but empty-handed, saved because he has faith, but saved so as through fire, because his faith was so nearly dead that it brought forth few works, and these of no high type of Christian excellence. His crown is far less resplendent and starry than the other's. His seat at Christ's table in the Kingdom is far lower. His heaven is narrower and less radiant. These two are like two vessels, one of which comes into harbour with a rich freight and flying colours, and is welcomed with tumult of acclaim. The other strikes on the bar "Some on

boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, all come safe to land." But ship and cargo, and profit of the venture, are all lost. "He shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved."

My friends! There is one thing saves a man's soul, and that is faith in Jesus Christ. But if a man's faith be so imperfect that it has very, very slightly influenced his character—and that is the case with many professing Christians that are listening untroubled to me now—his faith will never fit him for a lofty place in the Heavens. He will need a great deal to be burned out of him in that coming of our Lord, and he will only be fit to be among "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven."

No doubt there is a great gulf between the last of those who are within and the first of those who are without. No doubt the poorest building that is built on the foundation will have something that will stand when the storm comes, because it is founded on a rock, while the fairest that is on the sand will be swept away when the floods undermine its foundations, and the rain penetrates its roof, and the winds batter its walls. But do you, Christian men, cherish the noble ambition of being more than "a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord." Seek for high attainments in Christian character. It is well to desire for oneself a high place in the Kingdom, if the desire leads to the holy life and the earnest seeking after communion with Christ, to which alone such high places can be given.

So build on the foundation, and you will build secure. Build on it gold and silver and precious stones, true thoughts and holy deeds, loving, pure, unselfish, and Christlike. Giving all diligence, add to your faith whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, and so you will not merely be "saved as through fire," but an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

WHAT CROUCHES AT THE DOOR.

SERMON XIV.

WHAT CROUCHES AT THE DOOR.

"If thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door; and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."—GEN. iv. 7. (R. V.)

THESE early narratives clothe great moral and spiritual truths in picturesque forms, through which it is difficult for us to pierce. In the world's childhood, God spoke to men as to children, because there were no words then framed which would express what we call abstract conceptions. They had to be shown by pictures. But these early men, simple and childlike as they were, had consciences; and one abstraction they did understand, and that was sin. They knew the difference between good and evil.

So we have here God speaking to Cain, who was wroth because of the rejection of his sacrifice; and in dim, enigmatical words setting forth the reason of that rejection. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" Then clearly his sacrifice was rejected because it was the sacrifice of an evil doer. His description as such is given in the words of my text, which are hard for us to translate into our modern less vivid and picturesque language. "If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door; and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Strange

as the words sound, if I mistake not, they convey some very solemn lessons, and if well considered, become pregnant with meaning.

The key to the whole interpretation of them is to remember that they describe what happens after, and because of, wrong-doing. They are all suspended on "If thou doest not well." Then, in that case, for the first thing—"sin lieth at the door." Now the word translated here "lieth" is employed only to express the *crouching* of an animal, and frequently, of a wild animal. The picture then is of the wrong-doer's sin lying at his door there like a crouching tiger ready to spring, and if it springs, fatal. "If thou doest not well, a wild beast crouches at thy door."

Then there follow, with a singular swift transition of the metaphor, other words still harder to interpret, and which have been, as a matter of fact, interpreted in very diverse fashions. "And unto thee shall be *its*" (I make that slight alteration upon our version) "desire, and thou shalt rule over it. Where did we hear these words before? They were spoken to Eve, in the declaration of her punishment. They contain the blessing that was imbedded in the curse. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." The longing of the pure womanly heart to the husband of her love, and the authority of the husband over the loving wife—the source of the deepest joy and purity of earth, is transferred, by a singularly bold metaphor, to this other relationship, and, in horrible parody of the wedded union and love, we have the picture of the sin that was thought of as crouching at the sinner's door like a wild beast, now, as it were, wedded to him. He is mated to it now, and it has a kind of tigerish, murderous desire after him, while he on his part is to subdue and control it.

The reference of these clauses to the sin which has just

been spoken of involves, no doubt, a very bold figure, which has seemed to many readers too bold to be admissible, and the words have therefore been supposed to refer to Abel, who, as the younger brother, would be subordinate to Cain. But such a reference breaks the connection of the sentence, introduces a thought which is not a consequence of Cain's not doing well, has no moral bearing to warrant its appearance here, and compels us to travel an inconveniently long distance back in the context to find an antecedent to the "his" and "him" of our text. It seems to be more in consonance, therefore, with the archaic style of the whole narrative, and to yield a profounder and worthier meaning, if we recognise the boldness of the metaphor, and take "sin" as the subject of the whole. Now all this puts in concrete, metaphorical shape, suited to the stature of the hearers, great and solemn truths. Let us try to translate them into more modern speech.

I.—First think, then, of that wild beast which we tether to our doors by our wrong-doing.

We talk about "responsibility" and "guilt," and "consequences that never can be effaced," and the like. And all these abstract and quasi-philosophical terms are implied in the grim, tremendous metaphor of my text. "If thou doest not well, a tiger, a wild beast is crouching at thy door." We are all apt to be deceived by the imagination that when an evil deed is done, it passes away and leaves no permanent results. The lesson taught the childlike primitive man here, at the beginning, before experience had accumulated instances which might demonstrate the solemn truth, was that every human deed is immortal, and that the transitory evil thought, or word, or act, which seems to fleet by like a cloud, has a permanent being, and hereafter haunts the life of the doer, as a real presence. If thou doest not well, thou dost create a

horrible something which nestles beside thee henceforward. The momentary act is incarnated, as it were, and sits there at the doer's door-post waiting for him: which being turned into less forcible but more modern language, is just this:—every sin that a man does has perennial consequences, which abide with the doer for ever more.

I need not dwell upon illustrations of that to any length. Let me just run over two or three ways in which it is true. First of all, there is that solemn fact which we put into a long word that comes glibly off people's lips, and impresses them very little—the solemn fact of responsibility. We speak in common talk of such and such a thing lying at some one's door. Whether the phrase has come from this text I do not know. But it helps to illustrate the force of these words, and to suggest that they mean this, among other things, that we have to answer for every deed, however evanescent, however long forgotten. Its guilt is on our heads. Its consequences have to be experienced by us. We drink as we have brewed. As we make our beds, so we lie on them. There is no escape from the law of consequences. "If 'twere done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." But seeing that it is not done when 'tis done, then perhaps it would be better that it were not done at all. Your deed of a moment, forgotten almost as soon as done, lies there at your door; or to take a more modern and commercial figure, it is debited to your account, and stands inscribed against you for ever.

Think how you would like it if all your deeds from your childhood, all your follies, your vices, your evil thoughts, your evil impulses, and your evil actions—were all made visible and embodied there before you. They are there, though you do not see them yet. All round your door they sit ready to meet you and to bay out condemnation

as you go forth. They are there, and one day you will find out that they are. For this is the law, certain as the revolution of the stars and fixed as the pillars of the firmament—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is no seed which does not sprout in the harvest of the moral life. Every deed germinates according to its kind. For all that a man does he has to carry the consequences, and everyone shall bear his own burden. "If thou doest not well," it is not, as we fondly conceive it sometimes to be, a mere passing deflection from the rule of right, which is done and done with, but we have created, as out of our substance, a witness against ourselves whose voice can never be stifled. "If thou doest not well" thy sin takes permanent form and is fastened to thy door.

And then, let me remind you too, how the metaphor of our text is confirmed by other obvious facts, on which I need but briefly dwell. Putting aside all the remoter bearings of that thought of responsibility, I suppose we all admit that we have consciences; I suppose that we all know that we have memories. I suppose we all of us have seen, in the cases of others, and have experienced for ourselves, how deeds long done and long forgotten have an awful power of rising again after many long years.

Be sure that your memory has in it everything that you ever did. A landscape may be hidden by mists, but a puff of wind will clear them away, and it will all lie there, visible to the furthest horizon. There is no fact more certain than the extraordinary swiftness and completeness with which, in certain circumstances of life, and often very near the close of it, the whole panorama of the past may rise again before a man, as if one lightning flash showed all the dreary desolation that lay behind him. There have been men recovered from drowning and the

like, who have told us that, as in an instant, there seemed unrolled before their startled eyes the whole scroll of their earthly career.

The records of memory are like those pages on which you write with sympathetic ink, which disappears when dry, and seems to leave the page blank. You have only to hold it before the fire, or subject it to the proper chemical process, and at once it stands out legible. You are writing your biography upon the fleshly tables of your heart, my brother; and one day it will all be spread out before you, and you will be bid to read it, and to say what you think of it. The stings of a nettle will burn days after, if they are touched with water. The sting and inflammation of your evil deeds, though it has died down, is capable of being resuscitated, and it will be.

What an awful menagerie of unclean beasts some of us have at our doors! What sort of creatures have you tethered at yours? Crawling serpents, ugly and venomous; wild creatures, fierce and bloody, obscene and foul; tigers and bears; lustful and mischievous apes and monkeys? or such as are lovely and of good report,—doves and lambs, creatures pure and peaceable, patient to serve and gentle of spirit? Remember, remember, that what a man soweth—be it hemlock or be it wheat—that, and nothing else, "shall he reap."

II.—Now, let us look for a moment at the next thought that is here; which is put into a strong and, to our modern notions, somewhat violent metaphor;—the horrible longing, as it were, of sin toward the sinner—"Unto thee shall be its desire."

As I explained, these words are drawn from the previous chapter, where they refer to the holy union of heart and affection in husband and wife. Here they are transferred with tremendous force, to set forth that which is a kind of horrible parody of that conjugal relation. A man is

married to his wickedness, is mated to his evil, and it has, as it were, a tigerish longing for him, unhallowed and murderous. That is to say—our sins act towards us as if they desired to draw our love to themselves. This is just another form of the statement that when once a man has done a wrong thing it has an awful power of attracting him and making him hunger to do it again. Every evil that I do may, indeed, for a moment create in me a revulsion of conscience ; but it also exercises a fascination over me which it is hard to resist. It is a great deal easier to find a man that has never done a wrong thing than to find a man that has only done it once. If the wall of the dyke is sound it will keep the water out, but if there is the tinis est hole in it, it will all come in. So the evil that you doasserts its power over you, or, in the vigorous metaphor of my text, it has a fierce, longing desire after you, and it gets you into its clutches.

"The foolish woman sitteth in the high places of the city, and saith, Whoso is simple let him turn in hither. And foolish men go after her, and know not that her guests are in the depths of hell." Ah! my brother! beware of that siren voice that draws you away from all the sweet and simple and pure food which wisdom spreads upon her table, to tempt the beast that is in you with the words, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Beware of the first evils, for as sure as you are living, the first step taken will make the second seem to become necessary. The first drop will be followed by a bigger second, and the second, at a shorter interval, by a more copious third, until the drops become a shower, and the shower becomes a deluge. The course of evil is ever wider and deeper, and more tumultuous. The little sins get in at the window, and open the front door for the full-grown housebreakers. One smoothes the path for the other. All sin has an awful power of perpetuating

and increasing itself. As the prophet says in his vision of the doleful creatures that make their sport in the desolate city, "None of them shall want her mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of the island." Every sin tells upon character, and makes the repetition of itself more and more easy. "None is barren among them." And all sin is linked together in a slimy tangle, like a field of seaweed, so that the man once caught in its oozy fingers is almost sure to be drowned.

III.—And now, lastly, one word about the command, which is also a promise, "To thee shall be its desire, and thou shalt rule over it."

Man's primitive charter, according to the earlier chapters of Genesis, was to have dominion over the beasts of the field. Cain knew what it was to war against the wild creatures which contested the possession of the earth with man, and to tame some of them for his uses. And says the Divine voice, just as you war against the beasts of prey; just as you subdue to your purposes and yoke to your implements, the tameable animals over which you have dominion, so rule over *this* wild beast that is threatening you. It is needful for all men, if they do not mean to be torn to pieces, to master the animal that is in them, and the wild thing that has been created out of them. It is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. It is your own evil that is thus incarnated there, as it were, before you; and you have to subdue it, if it is not to tyrannise over you. We all admit that in theory. But how terribly hard the practice! The words of our text seem to carry but little hope or comfort in them, to the man who has tried—as, no doubt, many of us have tried—to flee the lusts that war against the soul, and to bridle the animal that is in him. Those who have done so most honestly know best how hard it is, and may fairly ask,

Is this useless repetition of the threadbare injunction all that you have to say to us? If so, you may as well hold your tongue. A wild beast sits at my door, you say, and then you bid me—"Rule thou over it!" Tell me to tame the tiger! "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook? Wilt thou take him a servant for ever?"

I do not undervalue the earnest and sometimes partially successful efforts at moral reformation which some men of more than usual force of character are able to make, emancipating themselves from outward practice of gross sin, and achieving for themselves much that is admirable. But if we rightly understand what sin is—namely, the taking self for our law and centre instead of God—and how deep its working and all-pervading its poison, we shall learn the tragic significance of the prophet's question, "Can the leopard change his spots?" Then may a man cast out sin from his nature by his own resolve, when the body can eliminate poison from the veins by its own energy. If there is nothing more to be said to the world than this message, "Sin lieth at thy door—rule thou over it," we have no Gospel to preach, and sin's dominion is secure. For there is nothing in all this world of empty, windy words, more empty and windy than to come to a poor soul that is all bespattered and stained with sin, and say to him: "Get up, and make thyself clean, and keep thyself so!" It cannot be done.

So my text, though it keeps itself within the limits of the law and only proclaims duty, must have hidden, in its very hardness, a sweet kernel of promise. For what God commands God enables us to do.

Therefore these words: "Rule thou over it," do really point onwards through all the ages to that one fact in which every man's sin is conquered and neutralised, and every man's struggles may be made hopeful and successful, the great fact that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, came down

from Heaven, like an athlete descending into the arena, to fight with and to overcome the grim wild beasts, our passions and our sins, and to lead them, transformed, in the silken leash of His love.

My brother! your sin is mightier than you. The old word of the Psalm is true about every one of us, "Our iniquities are stronger than we." And, blessed be His name! the hope of the Psalmist is the experience of the Christian. "As for my transgressions, Thou wilt purge them away." Christ will strengthen you to conquer; Christ will take away the guilt; Christ will bear, has borne, the responsibility; Christ will cleanse the memory; Christ will purge the conscience. Trusting to Him, and by His power and life within us, we may conquer our evil. Trusting to Him and for the sake of His blood shed for us all upon the Cross, we are delivered from the burden, guilt, and power of our sins and of our sin. With thy hand in His, and thy will submitted to Him, "Thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon thou shalt trample under foot."

A PURE CHURCH AN INCREASING CHURCH.

SERMON XV.

A PURE CHURCH AN INCREASING CHURCH.

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."—Acts ii. 47.
"And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved." (R.V.)

YOU observe that the principal alterations in the Revised Version of these words are two: the one the omission of "the church," the other the substitution of "were being saved" for "such as should be saved." The former of these changes has an interest as suggesting that at the early period referred to the name of "the church" had not yet been definitely attached to the infant community, and that the word afterwards crept into the text at a time when ecclesiasticism had become a great deal stronger than it was at the date of the writing of the Acts of the Apostles.

The second of the changes is of more importance. The Authorised Version's rendering suggests that salvation is a future thing, which in one aspect is partially true. The Revised Version, which is also by far the more literally accurate, suggests the other idea, that salvation is a process going on all through the course of a Christian man's life. And that carries very large and important lessons.

I.—I ask you to notice here, first, the profound conception which the writer had of the present action of the

ascended Christ. "The Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved."

Then, Christ (for it is He that is here spoken of as the Lord), the living, ascended Christ was present in, and working with, that little community of believing souls. And you will find that the thought of a present Saviour, Who is the life-blood of the Church on earth, and the spring of action for all good that is done in it and by it, runs through the whole of this book of the Acts of the Apostles.

The keynote of it is struck in its first verses: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up." That is the description of Luke's *gospel*, and it implies that the Acts of the Apostles is the *second* treatise, which tells all that Jesus continued to do and teach *after* that He was taken up. So the Lord, the ascended Christ, is the true theme and hero of this book. It is He, for instance, that sends down the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is He Whom the dying martyr sees "standing at the right hand of God," ready to help. It is He Who appears to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. It is He Who sends Paul and his company to preach in Europe. It is He Who opens hearts for the reception of their message. It is He Who stands by the Apostle in a vision, and bids him be of good cheer, and go forth upon his work. Thus, at every crisis in the history of the Church, it is the Lord—that is to say, Christ Himself—Who is revealed as working in them, and for them, the ascended but yet ever-present Guide, Counsellor, Inspirer, Protector, and Rewarder of them that put their trust in Him. So here it is He that adds to the Church daily them that were being saved.

I believe, dear brethren, that modern Christianity has far too much lost the vivid impression of this present

Christ as actually dwelling and working among us. What is good in us and what is bad in us conspire to make us think more of the past work of an ascended Christ than of the present work of an indwelling Christ. We cannot think too much of that Cross by which He has laid the foundation for the salvation and reconciliation of all the world; but we may easily think too exclusively of it, and so fix our thoughts upon that work which He completed when on Calvary He said, "It is finished!" as to forget the continual work which will never be finished until His Church is perfected, and the world is redeemed. If we are a Church of Christ at all, we have Christ in very deed among us, and working through us and on us. And unless we have, in no mystical and unreal and metaphorical sense, but in the simplest and yet grandest prose reality, that living Saviour here in our hearts and in our fellowship, better that these walls were levelled with the ground, and this congregation scattered to the four winds of Heaven. The present Christ is the life of His Church.

Notice, and that but for a moment, for I shall have to deal with it more especially at another part of this discourse,—the specific action which is here ascribed to Him. *He* adds to the Church, not *we*, not our preaching, not our eloquence, our fervour, our efforts; these may be the weapons in His hands, but the hand that wields the weapon gives it all its power to wound and to heal, and it is Christ Himself Who, by His present energy, is here represented as being the Agent of all the good that is done by any Christian community, and the Builder up of these Churches of His, in numbers and in power.

It is His will, His ideal of a Christian Church, that continuously it should be gathering into its fellowship those that are being saved. That is His meaning in the establishment of His Church upon earth; and that is His will concerning it and concerning us. And the question

should press on every society of Christians. Does our reality correspond to Christ's ideal? Are we, as a portion of His great heritage, being continually replenished by souls that come to tell what God has done for them? Is there an unbroken flow of such into what we call our communion? I speak to you members of this church, and I ask you to ponder the question,—Is it so? and the other question, If it is not so, wherefore? "The Lord added daily." Why does not the Lord add daily to us?

II.—Let us go to the second part of this text, and see if we can find an answer. Notice how emphatically there is brought out here the attractive power of an earnest and pure Church.

My text is the end of a sentence. What is the beginning of the sentence? Listen! "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added." Yes! Of course. Suppose you were like these people. Suppose this church and congregation bore stamped upon it, plain and deep as the broad arrow of the king, these characteristics —manifest fraternal unity, plain unselfish unworldliness, habitual unbroken devotion, gladness which had in it the solemnity of Heaven, and a transparent simplicity of life and heart, which knew nothing of by-ends and shabby, personal motives or distracting duplicity of purpose—do you not think that the Lord would add to you daily such as should be saved? Or, to put it into other words, wherever there is a little knot of men obviously held together by a living Christ, and obviously manifesting in their lives and characters the features of that Christ

transforming and glorifying them, there will be drawn to them—by natural gravitation, I was going to say, but we may more correctly say, by the gravitation which is natural in the supernatural realm—souls that have been touched by the grace of the Lord, and souls to whom that grace has been brought the nearer by looking upon *them*. Wheresoever there is inward vigour of life there will be outward growth; and the Church which is pure, earnest, living, will be a Church which spreads and increases.

Historically, it has always been the case that in God's Church seasons of expansion have followed upon seasons of deepened spiritual life on the part of His people. And the only kind of growth which is wholesome, and to be desired in a Christian community, is the growth as a consequence of the revived religiousness of the individuals who make up the community.

And just in like manner as such a community will draw to it men who are like-minded, so it will repel from it all the formalist people. There are congregations that have got the stamp of worldliness so deep upon them that the men who want to be burdened with as little religion as may be respectable will find themselves at home there. And I come to you Christian people here, for whose Christian character I am in some sense and to some degree responsible, with this appeal: Do you see to it that, so far as your influence extends, this community of ours be such as that half-dead Christians will never think of coming near us, and those whose religion is tepid will be repelled from us, but they who love the Lord Jesus Christ with earnest devotion and lofty consecration, and seek to live unworldly and saint-like lives, shall recognise in us men like-minded, and from whom they may draw help. I beseech you—if you will not misunderstand the expression—make your communion

such that it shall repel as well as attract; and that people will find nothing here to draw them to an easy religion of words and formalism, beneath which all vermin of worldliness and selfishness may lurk, but shall recognise in us a Church of men and women who are bent upon holiness, and longing for more and more conformity to the Divine Master.

Now, if all this be true, it is possible for worldly and stagnant communities calling themselves "churches" to thwart Christ's purpose, and to make it both impossible and undesirable that He should add to them the souls that He cares about. It is a solemn thing to feel that we may clog Christ's chariot-wheels, that there may be so little spiritual life in us, as a congregation, that, if I may so say, He dare not entrust us with the responsibility of guarding and keeping the young converts whom He loves and tends. We may not be fit to be trusted with them, and that may be why we do not get them. It may not be good for them that they should be dropped into the refrigerating atmosphere of such a Church, and that may be why they do not come.

Depend upon it, brethren, that, far more than my preaching, your lives will determine the expansion of this Church of ours. And if my preaching is pulling one way and your lives the other, and I have half an hour a week for talk and you have seven days for contradictory life, which of the two do you think is likely to win in the tug? I beseech you, take the words that I am now trying to speak, to yourselves. Do not pass them to the man in the next pew and think how well they fit him, but accept them as needed by you. And remember that just as a bit of sealing-wax, if you rub it on your sleeve and so warm it, develops an attractive power, the Church which is warmed will draw many to itself. If the earlier words of this context apply to any Christian com-

munity, then certainly its blessed promise will apply to it too, and to such a Church the Lord will add day by day them that are being saved.

III.—And now, lastly, observe the definition given here of the class of persons gathered into the community.

I have already observed, in the earlier portions of this discourse, that here we have salvation represented as a process, a progressive thing which runs on all through life. In the New Testament there are various points of view from which that great idea of salvation is represented. It is sometimes spoken of as past, in so far as in the definite act of conversion and the first exercise of faith in Jesus Christ the whole subsequent evolution and development are involved, and the process of salvation has its beginning then, when a man turns to God. It is sometimes spoken of as present, in so far as the joy of deliverance from evil and possession of good, which is God, is realised day by day. It is sometimes spoken of as future, in so far as all the imperfect possession and pre-libations of salvation which we taste here on earth prophesy and point onwards to their own perfecting in the climax of heaven. But all these three points of view, past, present, and future, may be merged into this one of my text, which speaks of every saint on earth, from the infantile to the most mature, as standing in the same row, though at different points; walking on the same road, though advanced different distances; all participant of the same process, of "being saved."

Through all life the deliverance goes on, the deliverance from sin, the deliverance from wrath. The Christian salvation, then, according to the teaching of this emphatic phrase, is a process begun at conversion, carried on progressively through the life, and reaching its climax in another state. Day by day, through the spring and the early summer, the sun is longer in the sky, and rises

higher in the heavens. And the path of the Christian is as the shining light. Last year's greenwood is this year's hardwood ; and the Christian, in like manner, has to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour. So these progressively, and, therefore, as yet imperfectly saved people, were gathered into the Church.

Now I have but two things to say about that. If that be the description of the kind of folk that come into a Christian Church, the duties of that Church are very plainly marked. And the first great one is to see to it that the community help the growth of its members. There are Christian Churches—I do not say whether ours is one of them or not—into which, if a young plant is brought, it is pretty sure to be killed. The temperature is so low that the tender shoots are burned as with frost, and die. I have seen people, coming all full of fervour and of faith, into Christian congregations, and finding, that the average round about them was so much lower than their own, they have cooled down after a bit to the fashionable temperature, and grown indifferent like their brethren. Let us, dear friends, remember that a Christian Church is a nursery of imperfect Christians, and, for ourselves and for one another, try to make our communion such as shall help shy and tender graces to unfold themselves, and woo out by the encouragement of example the lowest and the least perfect to lofty holiness and consecration like the Master's.

And if I am speaking to any in this congregation who hold aloof from Christian fellowship for more or less sufficient reasons, let me press upon them, in one word, that if they are conscious of however imperfect a possession of that incipient salvation, their place is thereby determined and they are doing wrong if they do not connect themselves with some Christian Communion, and stand forth as members of Christ's Church.

And now one last word. I have tried to show you that salvation, in the New Testament, is regarded as a process. The opposite thing is a process too. There is a very awful contrast in one of Paul's Epistles. "The preaching of the Cross is to them *who are in the act of perishing* foolishness; unto us who are *being saved*, it is the power of God." These two processes start, as it were, from the same point, one by slow degrees and almost imperceptible motion, rising higher and higher, the other, by slow degrees and almost unconscious descent, sliding steadily and fatally downward ever further and further.

And my point now is that in each of us one or other of these processes is going on. Either you are slowly rising or you are slipping down. Either a larger measure of the life of Christ, which is salvation, is passing into your hearts, or bit by bit you are dying as some man with creeping paralysis, that begins at the extremities, and with fell, silent, inexorable footstep advances further and further towards the citadel of the heart, where it lays its icy hand at last, and the man is dead. You are either "being saved" or you are "perishing." No man becomes a devil all at once, and no man becomes an angel all at once. Trust yourself to Christ, and He will lift you to Himself; turn your back upon Him, as some of you are doing, and you will settle down, down, down, in the muck and the mire of your own sensuality and selfishness, until at last the foul ooze spreads over your head, and you are lost in the bog for ever.

MAHANAIM: THE TWO CAMPS.

SERMON XVI.

MAHANAIM: THE TWO CAMPS.

"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim." (*i.e.*, two camps).—GEN. xxxii. 1, 2.

THIS vision came at a crisis in Jacob's life. He has just left the house of Laban, his father-in-law, where he had lived for many years, and in company with a long caravan, consisting of wives, children, servants, and all his wealth turned into cattle, is journeying back again to Palestine. His road leads him close by the country of Esau. Jacob was no soldier, and he is naturally terrified to meet his justly incensed brother. And so, as he plods along with his defenceless company trailing behind him, and as you may see the Arab caravans streaming over the same uplands to-day, all at once, in the middle of his march, a bright-harnessed army of angels meets him. Whether visible to the eye of sense, or, as would appear, only to the eye of faith, they *are* visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place "Mahanaim," two camps. One camp was the little one of his down here, with the helpless women and children and his own frightened and defenceless self, and the other was the great one up there, or rather in shadowy but most real

spiritual presence around about him, as a body-guard making an impregnable wall between him and every foe. We may take some very plain and everlastingly true lessons out of this story.

I.—First, the angels of God meet us on the dusty road of common life. "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him."

As he was tramping along there, over the lonely fields of Edom, with many a thought on his mind and many a fear at his heart, but feeling "There is the path that I have to walk on," all at once the air was filled with the soft rustle of angel wings, and the brightness from the flashing armour of the heavenly hosts flamed across his unexpecting eye. And so is it evermore. The true place for us to receive visions of God is in the path of the homely, prosaic duties which He lays upon us. The dusty road is far more likely to be trodden by angel feet than the remote summits of the mountain, where we sometimes would fain go; and many an hour consecrated to devotion has less of the manifest presence of God than is granted to some weary heart in its commonplace struggle with the little troubles and trials of daily life. These make the doors, as it were, by which the visitants draw near to us.

It is the common duties,

> "The narrow round, the daily task,

that not only give us "all we ought to ask," but are the selected means and channels by which, ever, God's visitants draw near to us. The man that has never seen an angel standing beside him, and driving his loom for him, or helping him at his counter and his desk, and the woman that has never seen an angel, according to the bold realism and homely vision of the old German picture, working with her in the kitchen and preparing the meal for the household, have little

chance of meeting such visitants at any other point of their experience or event of their lives.

If the week be empty of the angels, you will never catch sight of a feather of their wings on the Sunday. And if we do not recognise their presence in the midst of all the prose, and the commonplace, and the vulgarity, and the triviality and the monotony, the dust of the small duties, we shall go up to the summit of Sinai itself and see nothing there but cold grey stone and everlasting snows. "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." The true field for religion is the field of common life.

And then another side of the same thought is this, that it is in the path where God has bade us walk that we shall find the angels round us. We may meet them, indeed, on paths of our own choosing, but it will be the sort of angel that Balaam met, with a sword in his hand, mighty and beautiful, but wrathful too; and we had better not front him! But the friendly helpers, the emissaries of God's love, the Apostles of His grace, do not haunt the roads that we make for ourselves. They confine themselves rigidly to "the paths in which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." A man has no right to expect, and he will not get blessing and help and Divine gifts when, self-willedly, he has taken the bit between his teeth, and is choosing his own road in the world. But if he will say, "Lord! here I am; put me where Thou wilt, and do with me what Thou wilt," then he may be sure that that path, though it may be solitary of human companionship, and leading up amongst barren rocks and over bare moorlands, where the sun beats down fiercely, will not be unvisited by a better presence, so that in sweet consciousness of sufficiency of rich grace, he shall be able to say, "I, being in the way, the Lord met me."

II.—Still further, we may draw from this incident the lesson that God's angels meet us punctually at the hour of need.

Jacob is drawing nearer and nearer to his fear every step. He is now just on the borders of Esau's country, and close upon opening communications with his brother. At that critical moment, just before the finger of the clock has reached the point on the dial at which the bell would strike, the needed help comes, the angel guards draw near and camp beside him. It is always so. "The Lord shall help her, and that right early." His hosts come no sooner and no later than we need. If they appeared before we had realised our danger and our defencelessness, our hearts would not leap up at their coming, as men in a beleaguered town do when the guns of the relieving force are heard booming from afar. Often God's delays seem to us inexplicable, and our prayers to have no more effect than if they were spoken to a sleeping Baal. But such delays are merciful. They help us to the consciousness of our need. They let us feel the presence of the sorrow. They give opportunity of proving the weakness of all other supports. They test and increase desire for His help. They throw us more unreservedly into His arms. They afford room for the sorrow or the burden to work its peaceable fruits. So, and in many other ways, delay of succour fits us to receive succour, and our God makes no tarrying but for our sakes.

It is His way to let us come almost to the edge of the precipice, and then, in the very nick of time, when another minute and we are over, to stretch out His strong righ hand and save us. So Peter is left in prison, though prayer is going up unceasingly for him—and no answer comes. The days of the Passover feast slip away, and still he is in prison, and prayer does nothing for him. The

last day of his life, according to Herod's purpose, dawns, and all the day the Church lifts up its voice—but apparently there is no answer, nor any that regarded. The night comes, and still the vain cry goes up, and Heaven seems deaf or apathetic. The night wears on, and still no help comes. But in the last watch of that last night, when day is almost dawning, at nearly the last minute when escape would have been possible, the angel touches the sleeping Apostle, and with leisurely calmness, as sure that he had ample time, leads him out to freedom and safety. It was precisely because Jesus loved the household at Bethany that, after receiving the sister's message, He abode still for two days in the same place where He was. However our impatience may wonder and our faithlessness venture sometimes almost to rebuke Him when He comes with words like Mary's and Martha's—"Lord, if Thou hadst been here, such and such sorrows would not have happened, and Thou couldst so easily have been here"—we should learn the lesson that even if He has delayed so long that the dreaded blow has fallen, He has come soon enough to make it the occasion for a still more glorious communication of His power.

Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

III.—Again, we learn from this incident that the angels of God come in the shape which we need.

Jacob's want at the moment was protection. Therefore the angels appear in warlike guise, and present before the defenceless man another camp, in which he and his unwieldy caravan of women and children and cattle may find security. If his special want had been of some blessing of another kind, no doubt another form of appearance suited with precision to his need would have been imposed upon these angel helpers. For God's gifts to us change their character; as the Rabbis fabled that

the manna tasted to each man what each most desired The same pure Heavenly bread has the varying savour that commends it to varying palates. God's grace is Protean. It takes all the forms that man's necessities require. As water assumes the shape of any vessel into which it is put, so this great blessing comes to each of us, moulded according to the pressure and taking the form of our circumstances and necessities. His fulness is all-sufficient. It is the same blood that, passing to all the members, ministers to each according to the needs and fashion of each. And it is the same grace which, passing to our souls, in each man is shaped according to his present condition and ministers to his present wants.

So, dear brethren, in that great fulness each of us may have the thing that we need. The angel who to one man is protection, to another shall be teaching and inspiration, to another shall appear with chariots of fire and horses of fire to sweep the rapt soul heavenward; to another shall draw near as a deliverer from his fetters, at whose touch the bonds shall fall from off him; to another shall appear as the instructor in duty and the appointer of a path of service, like that vision that shone in the castle to the Apostle Paul, and said, "Thou must bear witness for me at Rome;" to another shall appear as opening the door of Heaven and letting a flood of light come down upon his darkened heart, as to the Apocalyptic seer in his rocky Patmos. And all this worketh that one and the self-same Lord of angels dividing to every man severally as He will, and as the man needs. The defenceless Jacob has the manifestation of the Divine presence in the guise of armed warriors that guard his unwarlike camp.

I add one last word. Long centuries after Jacob's experience at Mahanaim, another trembling fugitive found himself there, fearful, like Jacob, of the vengeance and anger of one who was knit to him by blood. When

poor King David was flying from the face of Absalom his son, the first place where he made a stand, and where he remained during the whole of the rebellion, was this town of Mahanaim, away on the eastern side of the Jordan. Do you not think that to the kingly exile, in his feebleness and his fear, the very name of his resting-place would be an omen? Would he not recall the old story, and bethink himself of how round that other frightened man

"Bright-harnessed angels stood in order serviceable;"

and would he not, as he looked on his little band of friends, faithful among the faithless, have his eyesight cleared to behold the other camp? Such a vision, no doubt, inspired the calm confidence of the psalm which evidently belongs to that dark hour of his life, and made it possible for the hunted king, with his feeble band, to sing even then, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety, solitary though I am."

Nor is the vision emptied of its power to stay and make brave by all the ages that have passed. The vision was for a moment; the fact is for ever. The sun's ray was flashed back from celestial armour, "the next all unreflected shone" on the lonely wastes of the desert—but the host of God was there still. The transitory appearance of the permanent realities is a revelation to us as truly as to the patriarch; and though no angel wings may winnow the air around our road, nor any sworded seraphim be seen on our commonplace march, we too have all the armies of Heaven with us, if we tread the path which God has marked out, and in our weakness and trembling commit ourselves to Him. The heavenly warriors die not, and hover around us to-day, excelling in the strength of their immortal youth, and as ready to succour us as they were all these centuries ago to guard the solitary Jacob.

Better still, the "Captain of the Lord's host" is "come up" to be our defence, and our faith has not only to behold the many ministering spirits sent forth to minister to us, but One mightier than they, Whose commands they all obey, and Who Himself is the companion of our solitude and the shield of our defencelessness. It was blessed that Jacob should be met by the many angels of God. It is infinitely more blessed that "*the* Angel of the Lord"—the One who is more than the many—"encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.

The postscript of the last letter which Gordon sent from Khartoum closed with the words, "The hosts are with me—Mahanaim." Were they not, even though death was near? Was that sublime faith a mistake—the vision an optical delusion? No, for their ranks are arrayed around God's children to keep them from all evil while He wills that they should live, and their chariots of fire and horses of fire are sent to bear them to Heaven when He wills that they should die.

THE CONTRASTED AIMS AND PARALLEL METHODS OF THE WORLD AND THE CHRISTIAN.

SERMON XVII.

THE CONTRASTED AIMS AND PARALLEL METHODS OF THE WORLD AND THE CHRISTIAN.

"They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."—1 COR. ix. 25.

THE imagery which the Apostle employs here is drawn from objects very familiar to the Corinthian Christians. A set of the most illustrious of the games of Greece was celebrated every third year within sight of their city. Every one of them had no doubt seen the *stadium*, or racecourse, of which he speaks in the previous verse, with its white marble seats crowded with eager spectators. They had all witnessed the racers straining every muscle to be first at the goal; and had marked the contrast between the many who failed, and slunk unnoticed into the crowd, and the one victor, received with a roar of welcoming applause. They knew the severe and long-protracted discipline of abstinence and exercise which was needful to give even a chance of success, and they understood what was the prize of all this effort—a twist of pine-leaves from the grove round the temple of the god. So all these points the Apostle seizes in order to enforce the lesson of self-denial which he has been avowing as the law of his own life, and desires to press upon his brethren of Corinth. For that

purpose he suggests a parallel and a contrast. The aims are wonderfully unlike, but the methods are identical. What were all the discipline and toil and pains of the racer for? A garland that would wither before the brows had become accustomed to it. "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." And yet their effort for an unworthy end is worthy to be our pattern and our stimulus for the loftiest end that men can set before them. So this poor runner is both a beacon and an example—a beacon in regard of what he chooses for his object; an example in regard of the noble and the wise way by which he pursues it. We have, then, here a double contrast—the world's sad folly in its aims, and noble wisdom in its methods, and the Christian's wisdom in his aims, and alas! too often folly in his means. "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown." Do we do it to obtain an incorruptible?

I.—Here we get, in a symbolical and picturesque fashion, the preaching of the world's sad folly in its ordinary aims.

The wreath of oak, or ivy, or laurel, or parsley, or vine which was twined round the brows of the victors in the various games of Greece was, of course, not what he ran for. It was only a symbol, and its entirely valueless character made it all the more valuable. Far better that it should be a twist of greenery that would soon fade, than silver cups or anything of material worth. For it expressed simply honour, pre-eminence, the joy of success, reputation. In front of the temple that presided over the games with which the Corinthians were familiar, was a long avenue, on either side of which stood ranged in order the white marble portrait-statues of the victors; and the hope that flushed many a man's face was that his image, with his name on its pedestal, should stand there. And where are they all? Their names forgotten, the marble likenesses

gone, buried beneath the green-sward, over which the shepherd to-day pastures his quiet flocks.

> "So passeth, in the passing of a day,
> Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower."

And all our pursuits, unless they be linked consciously and by repeated effort with eternity and with God, are as evanescent and as disproportioned to the magnitude and the capacities of us, the doers of them, as was the wreath for which months of discipline, and moments of almost superhuman effort, were considered but a small price to pay.

Oh, dear friends, surely I need not press upon you this lesson, that it is folly for men to take as the object of their lives and the aim of their efforts, the things that are shorter lived than the men that work for them. Surely, surely, it is folly that we should lavish our energies and render our hearts unto that which makes for itself wings and passes away. Business, providing for a family, the acquisition of some more or less modest competency, these are the things that necessarily demand a great deal of your attention and interest. You may so use them as that, whilst they are the nearer aims, the remoter aims of growing like your Master and fit for the inheritance may be reached through them all, and then they are blessed. Or you may so use them as that you build up of your earthly duties a thick, opaque barrier between you and your eternal wealth. In the one case you are wise, in the other case your epitaph will be "Thou fool!"

Do any of you remember the homely words in which a poet has put the lesson for us: "What good came of it at last?" asks the little child, when the old man is telling him of the great victory. "What good came of it *at last?*" That is the question that shivers into insignificance, and convicts of something not much different from insanity, much of all our lives, and the whole of some of our lives.

"They do it to obtain a corruptible crown,"—two pennyworth of parsley twisted into a wreath that will be brown to-morrow morning. It is a symbol of what some of you are living for.

II.—Now, in the next place, take the other side of that contrast, and consider the Christian's wisdom in his aim.

"But we an incorruptible," says Paul. Of course, the crown that is spoken about here is not the kingly crown, but the garland of the victorious athlete. It is interesting to notice the various instances of the employment of this figure in the New Testament, and the various aspects of the future blessedness which are represented by it.

For example, the same Apostle tells us, in almost the last words of his which have been left to us :—"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of *righteousness*." That there he is thinking of the crown of the victorious wrestler, coming wearied and yet conqueror out of the arena, is clear from the previous words, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course;" where both the pugilistic contest and the race are applied as emblems of Paul's career. Then again we read in the Epistle of James :—"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of *life* which the Lord hath promised." Then again we read in one of Peter's letters, that the elders who do their work faithfully and manfully shall receive at last from the Chief Shepherd "a crown of *glory* which fadeth not away." And then we read in John's Revelation, in the message to the persecuted Church at Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of *life*."

Possibly there may be a reference to the kingly crown in this promise from the Apocalypse, as royal dignities are very prominent in the promises of that book, and those who wear the crowns are, in another of its visions, seated on thrones. If so, there will be a threefold allu-

sion in the emblem. It will stand for a symbol of dominion, of victory, and of festivity. It is the crown of the king, or the wreath of the victor, or the garlands on the temples of the guests at the feast. It is a crown of life that is, it consists of life. The true life of the spirit which partakes of the perfect glorified immortal life of Jesus is the crown. It is a crown consisting of glory. The radiant lustre of a manifestly God-glorified spirit is the crown. The garland that encircles the calm brows of those who sit at the feast is no mere external adornment, but the lustre of a perfect character which is the outcome of a Christ-given life. It is the crown of righteousness, that is to say, the crown which is, and can be given only to righteousness. Only pure brows can wear it. It would burn like a circlet of fire if it were placed on other heads. Righteousness is the condition of obtaining it. The condition is further expressed in other forms in the other passages quoted, according to which, those "who love His appearing," or those who "endure temptation" and "love Him," or those who do the task of their calling in the Church, or those who are "faithful unto death," receive the crown, that is to say—the fundamental condition is love to Christ, that love which is the effect of faith and leads to loving His appearing, and the subsidiary conditions which follow on that love are faithful endurance, patient service, and strenuous effort in the Christian cause. They who possess these graces shall at the last receive, as the prophet has it, "a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." And these, thus attired and anointed and crowned for the banquet, are led in to sit for ever at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

This, then, brethren, is the aim which the Apostle would propose, and which he more than proposes, which

he asserts to be as a matter of fact, the aim of every person that has the right to call himself a Christian. Now, there is a sharp test for you. "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we——" What is to be filled in? We "do the same thing" to obtain an incorruptible crown. Is that your aim, Christian people? Do you live to win the laurel wreath of the victor, and that your brows may be twined with the garland of the feast? Have you triumphed over the nearer and lower objects, and are you living for the remoter and the nobler? If you are not, what business have you to call yourself a Christian? Men are classified by their aims in life. This is the description of Christ's followers: "We do it to obtain an incorruptible." Does that far-off wreath, extended from the hand of the Judge Who sits at the winning-post, draw your eyes? Does it mould your life? Do you shape your conduct in such a fashion as to secure it? Does it gleam before you with a brightness that makes all other and nearer objects insignificant and pale? Put the questions to yourselves. If you can answer them in the affirmative you are a happy man.

And more than that, if you can thus answer, if it is true about you that you do own this as your formative motive—"to obtain an incorruptible,"—then all these nearer object, will become even more blessed, and your whole life nobler than it otherwise would be.

The green of the lower slopes of the Alps never looks so vivid, their flowers never so lovely or so bright as when the eye rises from the grass to the snow, and from the flowers to the glaciers. And so all the lower reaches and levels of life look fairer, brighter, and the flowerets, that His providence sheds along across the grass like a smiles look the brighter and smell the sweeter because our eyes pass beyond them, and fix on the great white Throne that towers above them all. If you want life to be blessed and

noble, subordinate the present to the future, the material to the spiritual, all the corruptible crowns to the crown incorruptible. For the remoter our object the nobler our lives.

III.—And now again, passing by much that I wanted to say about this matter, let us turn to the other side of the double contrast that is here. Look at the world's noble wisdom in the choice of its means.

This poor racer, of whom my text speaks, had ten months of hard abstinence and exercise before there was even a chance for him to succeed in the conflict. And then there was a short spurt of tremendous effort and expenditure of energy before he came in at the goal. These things, both of them, self-denial habitually, and spurts of energy up to the very edge of physical endurance—are conditions of success in the world, and they are both of them noble and beautiful. No matter for what the man is doing it, however low may be the aim, the act of self-denial and the fact of effort are always better than the rust of self-indulgence and of languid indolence. It is better for him to be braced into self-control, and stirred into energetic activity, than to be rotting like a fat weed in the pestilential marshes of self-indulgence, and losing all pith and manhood in the languid dissolution of indolence.

And so, following out the Apostle's lead here, one cannot but look with admiration, and with a recognition of the beauty and the nobleness of the spectacle, at a great deal of the toil and effort that the world puts forth, even for its own shabby ends. Why, a man will spend twenty times as long in making himself a good conjurer, who can balance feathers and twirl plates upon a table, as some of us ever spent in trying to make ourselves good Christians. The hard toil that all these people who contribute to the public amusement go through in order to secure eminence

in their profession, ought to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of a great many of us. The world teaches us a lesson, as Paul set the lesson of these Corinthian races before Corinthian Christians. Think of the months of abstinence that any athlete, or horse-jockey, or pedestrian will go through here in England, and set by the side of that the sort of easy, languid, half-and-half pursuit of their great aim which characterises, alas! such a melancholy number of people that profess and call themselves Christians.

IV.—That brings me to the last side of the contrast here; and that is the folly of so many professing Christians in their way of pursuing their aims.

A languid runner had no chance, and he knew it. The phrase was almost a contradiction in terms. A racer that would not go into training would lose his breath in the first five minutes, and might as well drop out of the race. What about a languid Christian? Is that a more consistent idea? What about a man that sets out on the Divine life, and exercises no self-restraint or discipline over himself? Will he get on any better? If I let my desire and affections go flowing vagrantly over the whole low plain of material things they will be like a river that is lost in the swamp; there will not be force enough left in the channel to make a scour and to run, and the stream will never get to the ocean. If I set out on the race without having girt up my loins by honest, resolute self-restraint, self-denial, and self-crucifixion when need be, what can I expect but that before I have run half-a-dozen yards my ungirt robes will trip me up or get caught in the thorns and keep me back? My brother! No Christian progress is possible to-day, or ever was, or ever will be except on the old-fashioned conditions:—"Take up your cross, and deny yourself, and then come after Me." Learn from the world this lesson, that if a man wants to

succeed in any course He must shut out other, even legitimate ones. And do you put the lesson in practice in reference to your Christian life.

And then further, the runner that did not put all his powers into the five minutes of his race had no chance of coming in at the goal. And there is no different law in regard to Christian people. Up to the very edge of the capacity must be the effort. A languid Christian who does not strive with all his powers to live soberly, righteously, godly, and that with increasing completeness, will never make anything worth the making of his Christian career. It will be as in the old story,—the golden apple flung down before the racer will slacken his footsteps, and he will fall behind in the race. You must put all your strength into the work if you mean to run the race that is set before you, and to come at last to the goal.

God be thanked! We are crowned not because we are good but because Christ died. But the teaching of my text, that a Christian man must labour to win the prize, is by no means contradictory to, but complementary and confirmatory of the earlier truth, that a Christian man is crowned, as he is accepted, "not for works of righteousness which he hath done," but out of God's infinite mercy in Jesus Christ. Do not you pervert, as some are tempted to do, the great truth, that we are saved by Christ's death, and that Heaven is all a free gift from God, into the great falsehood that an idle Christian can excuse himself for his indolence by pleading his "faith," or can be crowned, "unless he strive according to the laws" of the arena; of which the first is this:—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; and the second is:—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY.

SERMON XVIII.

CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY.

"Then said he unto me, Son of Man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the House of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?"—EZEK. viii. 12.

THIS is part of a vision which came to the prophet in his captivity. He is carried away in imagination from his home amongst the exiles in the East to the Temple of Jerusalem. There he sees in one dreadful series representations of all the forms of idolatry to which the handful that were left in the land were cleaving. There meets him on the threshold of the court "the image of jealousy," the generalised expression for the aggregate of idolatries which had stirred the anger of the Divine husband of the nation. Then he sees within the Temple three groups representing the idolatries of three different lands. First, those with whom my text is concerned, who, in some underground room, vaulted and windowless, were bowing down before painted animal forms upon the walls. Probably they were the representatives of Egyptian worship, for the description of their temple might have been taken out of any book of travels in Egypt in the present day. It is only an ideal picture that is represented to Ezekiel, and not a real fact. It is not at all probable that all these various forms of idolatry were found at any

time within the Temple itself. And the whole cast of the vision suggests that it is an ideal picture, and not reality, with which we have to do. Hence the number of these idolaters was seventy—the successors of the seventy whom Moses led up to Sinai to see the God of Israel! And now here they are grovelling before brute forms painted on the walls in a hole in the dark. Their leader bears a name which might have startled them in their apostasy, and choked their prayers in their throats, for Jaazan-iah means "the Lord hears." Each man has a censer in his hand—self-consecrated priests of self-chosen deities. Shrouded in obscurity, they pleased themselves with the ancient lie, "The Lord sees not; He hath forsaken the earth." And then, into that Sanhedrim of apostates there comes, all unknown to them, the light of God's presence; and the eye of the prophet marks their evil.

I have nothing to do here with the other groups which Ezekiel saw in his vision. The next set were the representatives of the women of Israel, who, false at once to their womanhood and to their God, are taking part in the nameless obscenities and abominations of the worship of the Syrian Adonis. And the next, who from their numbers seem to be intended to stand for the representatives of the priesthood, as the former were of the whole people, represent the worshippers who had fallen under the fascinations of a widespread Eastern idolatry, and with their backs to the house of the Lord are bowing before the rising sun.

All these false faiths got on very well together. Their worshippers had no quarrel with each other. Polytheism, by its very nature and the necessity of its being, is tolerant. All its rabble of gods have a mutual understanding, and are banded together against the only One, that says, "Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me."

But now, I take this vision in a meaning which the prophet had no intention to put on it. I do not often do that with my texts, and when I do I like to confess frankly that I am doing it. So I take the words now as a kind of symbol which may help to put into a picturesque and more striking form some very familiar and homely truths. Look at that dark-painted chamber that we have all of us got in our hearts; at the idolatries that goon there, and at the flashing of the sudden light of God Who marks, into the midst of the idolatry. "Hast thou seen what the ancients of the children of Israel do in the dark, each man in the chambers of his imagery?"

I.—Think of the dark and painted chamber which we all of us carry in our hearts.

Every man is a mystery to himself as to his fellows. With reverence, we may say of each other as we say of God—"Clouds and darkness are round about Him." After all the manifestations of a life, we remain enigmas to one another and mysteries to ourselves. For every man is no fixed somewhat, but a growing personality, with dormant possibilities of good and evil lying in him, which up to the very last moment of his life may flame up altogether unexpected and astonishing developments. Therefore we have all to feel that after all self-examination there lie awful depths within us which we have not fathomed; and after all our knowledge of one another we yet do see but the surface, and each soul dwells alone.

There is in every heart a dark chamber. Oh! brethren, there are very, very few of us that dare tell all our thoughts and show our inmost selves to our dearest ones. The most silvery lake that lies sleeping amidst beauty, itself the very fairest spot of all, when drained off shows ugly ooze and filthy mud, and all manner of creeping abominations in the slime. I wonder what we should see if our hearts were, so to speak, drained off, and the very bottom layer

of every thing brought into the light. Do you think you would stand it? Well, then, go to God and ask Him to keep you from unconscious sins. Go to Him and ask Him to root out of you the mischiefs that you do not know are there, and live humbly and self-distrustfully, and feel that your only strength is: "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be saved." "Hast thou seen what they do in the *dark?*"

Still further, we may take another part of this description with possibly permissible violence as a symbol of another characteristic of our inward nature. The walls of that chamber were all painted with animal forms, to which these men were bowing down. By our memory, and by that marvellous faculty that people call the imagination, and by our desires, we are for ever painting the walls of the inmost chambers of our hearts with such pictures. That is an awful power which we possess, and, alas! too often use for foul idolatries.

I do not dwell upon that, but I wish to drop one very earnest caution and beseeching entreaty, especially to the younger members of my congregation now. You, young men and women, especially you young men, mind what you paint upon those mystic walls! Foul things, as my text says, "creeping things and abominable beasts," only too many of you are tracing there. Take care, for these figures are ineffaceable. No repentance will obliterate them. I do not know whether even Heaven can blot them out. What you love, what you desire, what you think about, you are photographing on the walls of your immortal soul. And just as to-day, thousands of years after the artists have been gathered to the dust, we may go into Egyptian temples and see the figures on their walls, in all the freshness of their first colouring, as if the painter had but laid down his pencil a moment ago; so, on your hearts, youthful evils, the sins of your boyhood, the pru

riences of your earliest days, may live in ugly shapes, that no tears and no repentance will ever wipe out. Nothing can do away with "the marks of that which once hath been." What are you painting on the chambers of imagery in your hearts? Obscenity, foul things, mean things, low things? Is that mystic shrine within you painted with such figures as were laid bare in some chambers in Pompeii, where the excavators had to cover up the pictures because they were so foul? Or, is it like the cells in the convent of San Marco at Florence, where Fra Angelico's holy and sweet genius has left on the bare walls, to be looked at, as he fancied, only by one devout brother in each cell, angel imaginings, and noble, pure celestial faces that calm and hallow those who gaze upon them? What are you doing, my brother, in the dark, in your chambers of imagery?

II.—Now look with me briefly, at the second thought that I draw from this symbol,—the idolatries of the dark chamber.

All these seventy grey-bearded elders that were bowing there before the bestial gods which they had portrayed, had, no doubt, often stood in the courts of the Temple and there made prayers to the God of Israel, with broad phylacteries, to be seen of men. Their true worship was the worship in the dark. The other was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. And the very chamber in which they were gathered, according to the ideal representation of our text, was a chamber in, and therefore partaking of the consecration of, the Temple. So their worship was doubly criminal, in that it was sacrilege as well as idolatry. Both things are true about us.

A man's true worship is not the worship which he performs in the public temple, but that which he offers down in that little private chapel, where nobody goes but himself. Worship is the attribution of supreme excellence to, and

the entire dependence of the heart upon, a certain person. And the people or the things to which a man attributes the highest excellence, and on which he hangs his happiness and well-being, these be his gods, no matter what his outward profession is. You can find out what these are for you, if you will ask yourself, and honestly answer one or two questions. What is that I want most? What is it which makes my ideal of happiness? What is that which I feel that I should be desperate without? What do I think about most naturally and spontaneously, when the spring is taken off, and my thoughts are allowed to go as they will? And if the answer to none of these questions is "God!" then I do not know why you should call yourself a worshipper of God's. It is of no avail that we pray in the temple, if we have the dark, subterranean pit, where our true adoration is rendered.

Oh! dear brethren, I am afraid there are a great many of us nominal Christians, connected with Christian churches, posing before men as orthodox religionists, who keep this private chapel where we do our devotion to an idol and not to God. If our real gods could be made visible, what a pantheon they would make! All the foul forms painted on that underground cell would be paralleled in the creeping things, which crawl along the low earth and never soar nor even stand erect, and in the vile, bestial forms of passion to which some of us really bow down. Honour, wealth, literary or other distinction, the sweet sanctities of human love dishonoured and profaned by being exalted to the place which Divine love should hold, ease, family, animal appetites, lust, drink—these are the gods of some of us. Bear with my poor words and ask yourselves, not whom do you worship before the eye of men, but who is the God to whom in your inmost heart you bow down? What do you do in the dark?

That is the question. Whom do you worship there? The other thing is not worship at all.

Do not forget that all such diversion of supreme love and dependence from God alone is like the sin of these men in our text, in that it is sacrilege. They had taken a chamber in the very Temple, and turned that into a temple of the false gods. Whom is your heart made to enshrine? Why! every stone, if I may so say, of the fabric of our being bears marked upon that it was laid in order to make a dwelling-place for God. Whom are you meant to worship, by the witness of the very constitution of your nature and make of your spirits? Is there anybody but One who is worthy to receive the priceless gift of human love absolute and entire? Is there any but One to whom it is aught but degradation and blasphemy for a man to bow down? Is there any being but One that can still the tumult of my spirit, and satisfy the immortal yearnings of my soul? We were made for God, and whensoever we turn the hopes, the desires, the affections, the obedience, and that which is the root of them all, the confidence that ought to fix and fasten upon Him, to other creatures, we are guilty not only of idolatry but of sacrilege. We commit the sin of which that wild reveller in Babylon was guilty, when, at his great feast, in the very madness of his presumption he bade them bring forth the sacred vessels from the Temple at Jerusalem; "and the king and his princes and his concubines drank in them and praised the gods." So we take the sacred chalice of the human heart, on which there is marked the sign manual of Heaven, claiming it for God's, and fill it with the spiced and drugged draught of our own sensualities and evils, and pour out libations to vain and false gods. Brethren! Render unto Him that which is His; and see even upon the walls scrabbled all over with the deformities that we have painted there, lingering traces,

like those of some dropping fresco in a roofless Italian church, which suggest the serene and perfect beauty of the image of the One Whose likeness was originally traced there, and for Whose worship it was all built.

III.—And now, lastly, look at the sudden crashing in upon the cowering worshippers of the revealing light.

Apparently the picture of my text suggests that these elders knew not the eyes that were looking upon them. They were hugging themselves in the conceit, "the Lord seeth not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." And all the while, all unknown, God and His prophet stand in the doorway and see it all. Not a finger is lifted, not a sign to the foolish worshippers of His presence and inspection, but in stern silence He records and remembers.

And does that need much bending to make it an impressive form of putting a solemn truth? There are plenty of us—alas! alas! that it should be so—to whom it is the least welcome of all thoughts that there in the doorway stand God and His Word. Why should it be, my brother, that the properly blessed thought of a Divine eye resting upon you should be to you like the thought of a policeman's bull's-eye to a thief? Why should it not be rather the sweetest and the most calming and strength-giving of all convictions—"Thou God seest me"? The little child runs about the lawn perfectly happy as long as she knows that her mother is watching her from the window. And it ought to be sweet and blessed to each of us to know that there is no darkness where a Father's eye comes not. But oh! to the men that stand before bestial idols and have turned their backs on the beauty of the one true God, the only possibility of composure is that they shall hug themselves in the vain delusion:—"The Lord seeth not."

I beseech you, dear friends, do not think of His eye as

the prisoner in a cell thinks of the pin-hole somewhere in the wall, through which a jailer's jealous inspection may at any moment be glaring in upon him, but think of Him your Brother, Who "knew what was in man," and Who knows each man, and see in Christ the all-knowing Godhood that loves yet better than it knows, and beholds the hidden evils of men's hearts, in order that it may cleanse and forgive all which it beholds.

One day a light will flash in upon all the dark cells. We must all be manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. Do you like that thought? Can you stand it? Are you ready for it? My friend! let Jesus Christ come to you with His light. Let Him come into the dark corners of your hearts. Cast all your sinfulness, known and unknown, upon Him that died on the Cross for every soul of man, and He will come; and His light, streaming into your hearts, like the sunbeam upon foul garments, will cleanse and bleach them white by its shining upon them. Let Him come into your hearts by your lowly penitence, by your humble faith, and all these vile shapes that you have painted on its walls will, like phosphorescent pictures in the daytime, pale and disappear when the Sun of Righteousness, with healing on His beams, floods your soul, leaving no part dark, and turning all into a Temple of the loving God.

FORMS VERSUS CHARACTER.

SERMON XIX.

FORMS VERSUS CHARACTER.

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God."—1 Cor. vii. 19.

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love."—Gal. v. 6.

"For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."—Gal. vi. 15. (R.V.)

The great controversy which embittered so much of Paul's life, and marred so much of his activity, turned upon the question whether a heathen man could come into the Church simply by the door of faith, or whether he must also go through the gate of circumcision. We all know how Paul answered the question. Time, which settles all controversies, has settled that one so thoroughly that it is impossible to revive any kind of interest in it; and it may seem to be a pure waste of time to talk about it. But the principles that fought then are eternal, though the forms in which they manifest themselves vary with every varying age.

The Ritualist—using that word in its broadest sense—on the one hand, and the Puritan on the other, represent permanent tendencies of human nature; and we find to-day the old foes with new faces. These three passages that I have read are Paul's deliverance on the question

of the comparative value of external rites and spiritual character. They are remarkable both for the identity in the former part of each and for the variety in the latter. In all the three cases he affirms, almost in the same language, that "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing," that the Ritualist's rite and the Puritan's protest are equally insignificant in comparison with higher things. And then he varies the statement of what the higher things are, in a very remarkable and instructive fashion. The "keeping of the commandments of God," says one of the texts, is the all-important matter. Then, as it were, he pierces deeper, and in another of the texts (I take the liberty of varying their order) pronounces that "a new creature" is the all-important thing. And then he pierces still deeper to the bottom of all, in the third text, and says the all-important thing is "faith which worketh by love."

I think I shall best bring out the force of these words by dealing first with that emphatic threefold proclamation of the nullity of all externalism; and then with the singular variations in the triple statement of what is essential, viz., spiritual conduct and character.

I.—First, the emphatic proclamation of the nullity of outward rites.

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing," say two texts. "Circumcision availeth nothing, and uncircumcision availeth nothing," says the other. It neither is anything nor does anything. Did Paul say that because circumcision was a Jewish rite? No. As I believe, he said it because it was *a rite;* and because he had learned that the one thing needful was spiritual character, and that no external ceremonial of any sort could produce that. I think we are perfectly warranted in taking this principle of my text, and in extending it beyond the limits of the Jewish

rite about which Paul was speaking. For if you remember, he speaks about baptism, in the first chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, in a precisely similar tone and for precisely the same reason, when he says, in effect, "I baptised Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas, and I think these are all. I am not quite sure. I do not keep any kind of record of such things; God did not send me to baptise, He sent me to preach the Gospel."

The thing that produced the spiritual result was not the rite, but the truth, and therefore he felt that his function was to preach the truth and leave the rite to be administered by others. Therefore we can extend the principle here to all externalisms of worship, in all forms, in all churches, and say that in comparison with the essentials of an inward Christianity they are nothing and they do nothing.

They have their value. As long as we are here on earth, living in the flesh, we must have outward forms and symbolical rites. It is in Heaven that the seer "saw no temple." Our sense-bound nature requires, and thankfully avails itself of, the help of external rites and ceremonials to lift us up towards the Object of our devotion. A man prays all the better if he bow his head, shut his eyes, and bend his knees. Forms do help us to the realisation of the realities and the truths which they express and embody. Music may waft our souls to the heavens, and pictures may stir deep thoughts. That is the simple principle on which the value of all external aids to devotion depends. They may be helps towards the appreciation of Divine truth, and to the suffusing of the heart with devout emotions which may lead to building up a holy character.

There is a worth, therefore—an auxiliary and subordinate worth, in these things, and in that respect they

are *not* nothing, nor do they "avail nothing." But then all external rites tend to usurp more than belongs to them, and in our weakness we are apt to cleave to them, and instead of using them as means to lift us higher, to stay in them, and as a great many of us do, to mistake the mere gratification of taste and the excitement of the sensibilities for worship. A bit of stained glass may be glowing with angel-forms and pictured saints, but it always keeps some of the light out, and it always hinders us from seeing through it. And all external worship and form have so strong a tendency to usurp more than belongs to them, and to drag us down to their own level, even whilst we think that we are praying, that I believe the wisest man will try to pare down the externals of his worship to the lowest possible point. If there be as much body as will keep a soul in, as much form as will embody the spirit, that is all that we want. What is more is dangerous.

All form in worship is like fire, it is a good servant but it is a bad master, and it needs to be kept very rigidly in subordination, or else the spirituality of Christian worship vanishes before men know; and they are left with their dead forms which are only evils—crutches that make people limp by the very act of using them.

Now, my dear friends, when that has happened, when men begin to say, as the people in Paul's time were saying about circumcision, and as people are saying in this day about Christian rites, that they are necessary, then it is needful to take up Paul's ground and to say, "No! they are nothing!" They are useful in a certain place, but if you make them obligatory, if you make them essential, if you say that grace is miraculously conveyed through them, then it is needful that we should raise a strong note of protestation, and declare their

absolute nullity for the highest purpose, that of making that spiritual character which alone is essential.

And I believe that this strange recrudescence—to use a modern word—of ceremonialism and æsthetic worship which we see all round about us, not only in the ranks of the Episcopal Church, but amongst Nonconformists, who are sighing for a less bare service, and here and there are turning their chapels into concert-rooms, and instead of preaching the Gospel are having "Services of Song" and the like—that all this makes it as needful to-day as ever it was to say to men: "Forms are not worship. Rites may crush the spirit. Men may yield to the sensuous impressions which they produce, and be lapped in an atmosphere of æsthetic emotion, without any real devotion."

Such externals are only worth anything if they make us grasp more firmly with our understandings and feel more profoundly with our hearts, the great truths of the Gospel. If they do that, they help; if they are not doing that, they hinder, and are to be fought against. And so we have again to proclaim to-day, as Paul did, "Circumcision is nothing," "but the keeping of the commandments of God."

Then notice with what remarkable fairness and boldness and breadth the Apostle here adds that other clause: "and uncircumcision is nothing." It is a very hard thing for a man whose life has been spent in fighting against an error not to exaggerate the value of his protest. It is a very hard thing for a man who has been delivered from the dependence upon forms not to fancy that his formlessness is what the other people think that their forms are. The Puritan who does not believe that a man can be a good man because he is a Ritualist or a Roman Catholic, is committing the very same error as the Ritualist or the Roman Catholic who does not believe that the Puritan can be a Christian unless he has been "christened." The

two people are exactly the same, only the one has hold of the stick at one end and the other at the other. There may be as much idolatry in superstitious reliance upon the bare worship as in the advocacy of the ornate; and many a Nonconformist who fancies that he has "never bowed the knee to Baal" is as true an idol-worshipper in his superstitious abhorrence of the ritualism that he sees in other communities, as are the men who trust in it the most.

It is a large attainment in Christian character to be able to say with Paul, "Circumcision is nothing, and my own favourite point of uncircumcision is nothing either. Neither the one side nor the other touches the essentials."

II.—Now let us look at the threefold variety of the designation of these essentials here.

In our first text from the Epistle to the Corinthians we read, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.' If we finished the sentence it would be, "but the keeping of the commandments of God is everything."

And by that "keeping the commandments," of course, the Apostle does not mean merely external obedience. He means something far deeper than that, which I put into this plain word. The one essential of a Christian life is the conformity of the will with God's—not the external obedience merely, but the entire surrender and the submission of my will to the will of my Father in Heaven. That is the all-important thing; that is what God wants; that is the end of all rites and ceremonies; that is the end of all revelation and of all utterances of the Divine heart. The Bible, Christ's mission, His passion and death, the gift of His Divine Spirit, and every part of the Divine dealings in providence, all converge upon this one aim and goal. For this purpose the Father worketh hitherto, and Christ works, that man's will may yield and

bow itself wholly and happily and lovingly to the great Infinite will of the Father in Heaven.

Brethren! that is the perfection of a man's nature, when his will fits on to God's like one of Euclid's triangles superimposed upon another, and line for line coincides. When his will allows a free passage to the will of God, without resistance or deflection, as light travels through transparent glass; when his will responds to the touch of God's finger upon the keys, like the telegraphic needle to the operator's hand, then man has attained all that God and religion can do for him, all that his nature is capable of; and far beneath his feet may be the ladders of ceremonies and forms and outward acts by which he climbed to that serene and blessed height, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of God's commandments is everything."

That submission of will is the sum and the test of your Christianity. Your Christianity does not consist only in a mere something which you call faith in Jesus Christ. It does not consist in emotions, however deep and blessed and genuine they may be. It does not consist in the acceptance of a creed. All these are means to an end. They are meant to drive the wheel of life, to build up character, to make your deepest wish to be, "Father! not my will, but Thine, be done." In the measure in which that is your heart's desire, and not one hair's breadth further, have you a right to call yourself a Christian.

But, then, I can fancy a man saying: "It is all very well to talk about bowing the will in this fashion; how can I do that?" Well, let us take our second text—the third in the order of their occurrence—"For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." That is to say, if we are ever to keep the will of God we must be made over again. Ay! we

must! Our own consciences tell us that; the history of all the efforts that ever we have made—and I suppose all of us have made some now and then, more or less earnest and more or less persistent—tells us that there needs to be a stronger hand than ours to come into the fight if it is ever to be won by us. There is nothing more heartless and more impotent than to preach, "Bow your wills to God, and then you will be happy; bow your wills to God, and then you will be good." If that is all the preacher has to say, his powerless words will but provoke the answer, "We cannot. Tell the leopard to change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin, as soon as tell a man to reduce this revolted kingdom within him to obedience, and to bow his will to the will of God. We cannot do it." But, brethren, in that word, "a new creature," lies a promise from God; for a creature implies a creator. "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." The very heart of what Christ has to offer us is the gift of His own life to dwell in our hearts, and by its mighty energy to make us free from the law of sin and death which binds our wills. We may have our spirits moulded into His likeness, and new tastes, and new desires, and new capacities infused into us, so as that we shall not be left with our own poor powers to try and force ourselves into obedience to God's will, but that submission and holiness, and love that keeps the commandments of God, will spring up in our renewed spirits as their natural product and growth. Oh! you men and women who have been honestly trying, half your lifetime, to make yourselves what you know God wants you to be, and who are obliged to confess that you have failed, hearken to the message: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away." The one thing needful is keeping the commandments of God, and the only way by which we can keep the commandments of God is that we should be formed

again into the likeness of Him of Whom alone it is true that "He did always the things that pleased" God.

And so we come to the last of these great texts: "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love." That is to say, if we are to be made over again, we must have faith in Christ Jesus. We have got to the root now, so far as we are concerned. We must keep the commandments of God; if we are to keep the commandments we must be made over again, and if our hearts ask how can we receive that new creating power into our lives, the answer is, by "faith which worketh by love."

Paul did not believe that external rites could make men partakers of a new nature, but he believed that if a man would trust in Jesus Christ, the life of that Christ would flow into his opened heart, and a new spirit and nature would be born in him. And, therefore, his triple requirements come all down to this one, so far as we are concerned, as the beginning, and the condition of the other two. "Neither circumcision does anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love," does everything. He that trusts Christ opens his heart to Christ, Who comes with His new-creating Spirit, and makes us willing in the day of His power to keep His commandments.

But faith leads us to obedience in yet another fashion, than this opening of the door of the heart for the entrance of the new-creating Spirit. It leads to it in the manner which is expressed by the words of our text, "worketh by love." Faith shows itself living, because it leads us to love, and through love it produces its effects upon conduct.

Two things are implied in this designation of faith. If you trust Christ you will love Him. That is plain enough. And you will not love Him unless you trust Him. Though it lies wide of my present purpose, let us take this lesson

in passing. You cannot work yourself up into a spasm or paroxysm of religious emotion and love by resolution or by effort. All that you can do is to go and look at the Master and get near Him, and that will warm you up. You can love if you trust. Your trust will make you love; unless you trust you will never love Him.

The second thing implied is, that if you love you will obey. That is plain enough. The keeping of the commandments will be easy where there is love in the heart. The will will bow where there is love in the heart. Love is the only fire that is hot enough to melt the iron obstinacy of a creature's will. The will cannot be driven. Strike it with violence and it stiffens; touch it gently and it yields. If you try to put an iron collar upon the will, like the demoniac in the Gospels, the touch of the apparent restraint drives it into fury, and it breaks the bands asunder. Fasten it with the silken leash of love, and a "little child" can lead it. So faith works by love, because whom we trust we shall love, and whom we love we shall obey.

Therefore we have got to the root now, and nothing is needful but an operative faith, out of which will come all the blessed possession of a transforming spirit, and all sublimities and noblenesses of an obedient and submissive will.

My brother! Paul and James shake hands here. There is a "faith" so called, which does not work. It is dead! Let me beseech you, none of you to rely upon what you choose to call your faith in Jesus Christ, but examine it. Does it do anything? Does it help you to be like Him? Does it open your hearts for His Spirit to come in? Does it fill them with love to that Master, a love which proves itself by obedience? Plain questions, questions that any man can answer; questions that go to the root of the whole matter. If your faith does that, it is genuine; if it does not, it is not.

And do not trust either to forms or to your freedom from forms. They will not save your souls, they will not make you more Christ-like. They will not help you to pardon, purity, holiness, blessedness. In these respects neither if we have them are we the better, nor if we have them not are we the worse. If you are trusting to Christ, and by that faith are having your hearts moulded and made over again into all holy obedience, then you have all that you need. Unless you have, though you partook of all Christian rites, though you believed all Christian truth, though you fought against superstitious reliance on forms, you have not the one thing needful, for "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love."

THE THIRST OF THE SOUL AFTER GOD AND ITS SATISFACTION IN GOD.

SERMON XX

THE THIRST OF THE SOUL AFTER GOD AND ITS SATISFACTION IN GOD.

"O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;
To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary
Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee.
Thus will I bless Thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in Thy name.
My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips;
When I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches.
Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.
My soul followeth hard after Thee; Thy right hand upholdeth me.
But those that seek after my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth.
They shall fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for foxes.
But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by Him shall glory; but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped."—PSA. lxiii. 1-11.

THIS Psalm contains very distinct traces of the circumstances under which it sprang up in the Psalmist's heart. He is an exile, in a dry and weary land; he is excluded from the sanctuary, he is followed by enemies that seek his life; he is a king. All these points confirm the accuracy of the ancient Jewish heading:—"A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah."

In that arid tract which stretches along the western shore of the Dead Sea, and thence northward, David was

twice during his adventurous life,—once during the Sauline persecution, once during Absalom's revolt. It cannot be the former of these times which is referred to here, because the Psalmist was not then a king; it must therefore be the latter.

That was the darkest hour of his life. His favourite and good-for-nothing son was seeking to grasp his sceptre; his familiar friend in whom he trusted had lifted up the heel against him. He knew that his own sin had come back to roost with him; and so, with bleeding heart, with agonised conscience, with crushed spirit, he bowed himself, and meekly and penitently accepted the chastisement. Therefore it was sweetened to him; and this Psalm, with its passion of love and mystic rapture, is a monument for us of how his sorrows had brought to him a closer union with God, as our sorrows may do for us; like some treasure washed to our feet by a stormy sea.

Let us read the Psalm over together and try to feel its force as the utterance of a soul seeking after and finding God. I think the key to its arrangement will be found in the threefold recurrence of an emphatic word. In the first verse I read, "My soul thirsteth for Thee;" in the fifth verse, "My soul shall be satisfied;" in the eighth verse, "My soul followeth hard after Thee." These three points, I think, are the turning points of the Psalm, and they show us the soul longing; the longing soul satisfied; the satisfied soul still seeking. Let us take, then, these three thoughts, and look at them as the centre-points of the respective portions of the Psalm to which they belong.

I.—First, then, we have the soul longing for God.

Now, observe that this longing is not that of a man who has no possession of God. Rather is it the desire of a heart which is already in union with Him for a closer

union; rather is it the tightening of the grasp with which the man already holds his Father in Heaven. All begins with the utterance of a personal appropriating faith. "O God! Thou art my God!" The beginning of all personal religion is when I am conscious of a personal relation with God; when I feel that He and I possess each other by a mutual love; when I put out my hand, and humbly but confidently claim my individual portion in the world-wide power and love. A Christian is he who says, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*." We must individualise, and appropriate as our very own, the promises and the grace that belong to the whole world. "O God! Thou art *my* God."

And then upon that there are built earnest seeking, expressed in the words "Early," that is to say, "earnestly," "will I seek Thee," and the intensest longing, breathing in the pathetic utterance, "My soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and weary land where no water is." Notice the picturesque, poetic beauty of taking David's surroundings as the emblem of his feelings. Nature seems to reflect his mood. He looks out on the stony, monotonous, burnt-up, barren country about him; at the cracks in the soil gaping for the rain which comes not; and he sees the emblem of a heart yearning after God and not possessing Him. He and his men have been toiling, wearied, across the "the burning marl," looking in all the torrent-beds for some drop of water to cool their parched throats, and finding none. And that seems to him like the search of a soul after a far-off God.

And then, notice what it is, or rather Whom it is that the Psalmist longs for. "My soul thirsts *for Thee*." All souls do. We are all crying out for the living God, only the difference between us is that some of us know what it is that we want, and that some of us do not. Blessed are they who can say: "Thou art my God"; and who can

add: "My soul thirsteth for *Thee*," in Whom, and in Whom only, is the fountain at which we can all slake our thirst and be satisfied.

Notice the intensity of the desire. Think of the picture that rises from these graphic words. Here is the caravan toiling through the desert; men's lips are black with thirst, their parched tongues lolling from their mouths; a film comes over their glazing eyes, their steps totter, their heads throb. Far away yonder is a stunted tree which tells of water near it. How they plunge their faces into the black mud when they come to it, and with what a fierce passion they satisfy their cravings!

There is no such overmastering appetite as thirst. Is it the least like your desire after God? Can anybody say that these words of my text are an honest description of the ordinary experience of ordinary Christians? "My soul thirsteth for God;" cried this seeker after Him, and the longing seems to have affected even his bodily health. Is that or anything like it true, about you, brethren? What sort of Christians are we if it is not?

And notice *when* it was that this man thus longed. It was in the midst of his sorrow. Even then the thing that he wanted most was not restoration to Jerusalem, or the defeat of his enemies, but union with God. Oh! that is a test of faith, and one which very little of our faith could stand, that even when we are ringed about by calamities that seem to crush us, what we long for most is not the removal of the sorrow but the presence of our Father. Good men are driven to God by the stress of tempests, and ordinary and bad men are generally driven away from Him. What does your sorrow do for you, friend? Does it make you writhe in impatience, does it make you murmur sullenly against His imposition of it, or does it make you feel that now in the stress and agony there is nothing that you can grasp and hold to but Him, and Him alone?

And so in the hour of darkness and need is your prayer, in its deepest meaning, not "Take away Thy heavy hand from me," but "Give me more of Thyself, that I may bear Thy hand, however heavy its pressure"?

Still looking at this first portion of our Psalm, of which that desire, intense and ardent, is the keynote, I notice that this longing, though it be struck out by sorrow, is not forced upon him for the first time by sorrow. The second verse of our Psalm might be more accurately rendered with the transposition of the two clauses, somewhat in this fashion :—"So have I gazed upon Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory." That is to say, in like manner as in his sorrows and in the wilderness he is conscious of this desire after God, so does he remember that amidst the sanctities of the Tabernacle and the joyful services and sacrifices of its ritual worship he looked through the forms to Him that shone in them, and in them beheld His power and His glory. So the longing that springs in his heart is an old longing. He remembers past times when it has been with him, and his days of sorrow are not the first days in which he has been driven to say :—"Come Thou and help me." He can remember glad, peaceful moments of communion, and these are homogeneous and of a piece with his religious contemplations in his hours of sorrow.

Ah ! brother ! that life is but a poor, fragmentary one which seeks God by fits and starts ; and that seeking after God is but a half-hearted and partial one which is only experienced in the moments of pain and grief. It is well to cry for Him in the wilderness, but it is not well that it should only be the wilderness in which we cry for Him. It is well when darkness and disaster teach us our need of Him ; but it is not well when we require the darkness and the disaster to teach us our need.

And, on the other hand, that is but a poor, fragmentary

life, and that religion is but a very incomplete and insincere one which is more productive of raptures in the sanctuary than of seeking after God in the wilderness. There are plenty of Christian people who have a great deal more consciousness of God's presence in the idle emotions of a church or a chapel than in the strenuous efforts of daily life. Both things separately are maimed and miserable; and both must be put together—the communion in the sanctuary and the communion in the wilderness; seeking after Him in the sanctities of worship, and seeking after Him in the prose of daily life—if ever the worship of the sanctuary or the prose of daily life are to be brightened with His presence.

Then, still further, this longing is animated by a profound consciousness that God is best. "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life." Life is good mainly as the field upon which God's lovingkindness may be manifested and grasped. It is like the white sheet on which the beam of light is thrown, worth nothing in itself, worth everything as the medium for the manifestation of that lustrous light. It is like a painted window—only a poor bit of glass till the sunshine gleams behind it, and then it flashes up into rubies and purple and gold. Life is best when through life there filters or flashes on us the brightness of the lovingkindness of the Lord. And all real religion includes in it a calm, deliberate, fixed preference of God to life itself. Does your religion include that? Can you say, "It were wise and it were blessed to die, to get more of God into my soul"? If not, our longing, which is the very language of the Spirit in our hearts, has to be much intensified ere it reaches its fitting height.

And then, still further, this longing is accompanied with a firm resolve of continuance. "Thus will I bless Thee while I live." "Thus"—as I am doing now in the

midst of my longing—"I will lift up my hands in Thy name." So much, then, for the first portion of the Psalm.

II.—Now turn for a moment to the second portion, which is included in the next three verses, where we have the longing soul satisfied. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness."

Notice, now, how very beautiful that immediate turn in the Psalmist's feelings is. The fruition of God is contemporaneous with the desire after God. The one moment, "My soul thirsteth"; the next moment, "My soul is satisfied." As in the wilderness when the rain comes down, and in a couple of days what was baked earth is flowery meadow, and all the torrent-beds where the white stones glistened ghastly in the heat are foaming with rushing water, and fringed with budding willows; so in the instant in which a heart turns with true desire to God, in that instant does God draw near to it. The Arctic spring comes with one stride; to-day snow, to-morrow flowers. There is no time needed to work this telegraph; while we speak He hears; before we call He answers. We have to wait for many of His gifts, never for Himself. We have to wait sometimes when by our own faults we postpone the coming of the blessings that we have asked. If we are thinking more about Absalom and Ahitophel than about God; more about our sorrows and our troubles than about Himself; if we are busy with other things; if having asked we do not look up and expect; if we shut the doors of our hearts as soon as our prayer is offered, or languidly stroll away from the place of prayer ere the blessing has fluttered down upon our souls, of course we do not get it. But God is always waiting to bestow, and all that we need to do is to open the sluices and the great ocean flows in, or as much of it as our hearts can hold. "My soul thirsteth," is the experience of the one moment,

and ere the clock has ticked again, "My soul shall be satisfied."

Then notice, the soul that possesses God is fed full. The emblem here, of course, is of a joyful feast, possibly of a sacrificial one ; but the fact is that whoever has got a living hold of God and a little bit of God lovingly imbedded in his heart, has got as much as he needs. Between God and him there is such a correspondence as that He is the absolute and all-sufficient good. If I may so say, every hollow in my nature answers to a protuberance in His, and when you put the two together the little heart is filled by the great heart that has come in to it. We are at rest when we have God, and to long for Him is to insure the possession of an absolute and all-sufficient good.

We have here, still further, the satisfied soul breaking into the music of praise. "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night-watches." There is a reference, no doubt, there, to the little camp in the wilderness, where David and his men, unguarded save by God, laid themselves down to sleep beneath the Syrian sky with all its stars, and where the leader, no doubt, often awoke in the night, with pricked-up ears listening for the sound of an approaching enemy. And even then into his heart there steals the thought of his great Protector ; and as he says in another of the Psalms dating from this period, "I will lay me down in peace and sleep, because Thou makest me to dwell, though solitary, in safety." The heart that feeds upon God is secure, and breaks into songs in the night, and music of praise. That feast has always minstrels at it. The spontaneous utterance of a heart feeding on God is thankfulness and praise, which is as natural as smiles when we are glad, or as tears when we mourn.

And then, still further, this satisfaction leads on to a triumphant hope. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." Such a past and such a present can only have one kind of future as their consequence—a future in which the seeking soul nestling beneath the great outstretched wings shall crowd close to the Father's heart, and be guarded by His love. If we hold fellowship with Him He protects us. As another Psalm says, using a similar metaphor: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Communion with God means protection by God.

The past of the seeking soul is the certain pledge of its future. The uncertainties of the dim to-morrow, in so far as earth is concerned, are so many that we can never say, "To-morrow shall be as this day." And in regard of all other sources of blessing, the dearest and the purest, we have all to feel, with sinking, sickening hearts, that the longer we have had them the nearer comes the day of their certain loss. But about Him we can say, "Because Thou *hast* been my Helper, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings *will* I rejoice." And in union with Him we can look out over all the dim sea that stretches before us, and though we know not what storms may vex the surface, or whither its currents may carry us, we can say, "Thou wilt be with Me, and in Thee I shall have peace."

III.—And so, lastly, the final section of this Psalm gives us the satisfied soul still seeking after God. "My soul followeth hard after Thee, Thy right hand upholdeth me."

The word translated *followeth* here literally means *to cleave or to cling.* And there is a beautiful double idea of a twofold relationship expressed in that somewhat incongruous form of speech, "cleave after Thee," the former word giving the idea of union and possession, the

latter suggesting the other idea of search and pursuit. So that the two main currents of thought in the Psalm are repeated in that little phrase: and we are back again —though with a wonderful difference—to the ground tone of the first section. There the soul thirsteth; here "the soul cleaveth after"—both expressive of pursuit, but the latter, as consequent upon the satisfaction which followed upon the thirst, speaks of a profounder possession and of a less painful sense of want.

"My soul cleaveth after God." That is to say, inasmuch as He is infinite, and this nature of mine capable of indefinite expansion, each new possession of Him which follows upon an enlarged desire will open the elastic walls of my heart so that they shall enclose a wider space and be capable of holding more of God, and therefore I shall possess more. Desire expands the heart; possession expands the heart. More of God comes when we can hold more of Him, and the end of all fruition is the renewed desire after further fruition.

This world's gifts cloy and never satisfy; God satisfies and never cloys. And we have, and we shall have, if we are His children, the double delight of a continued fruition, and a continued desire. So we shall ascend, if I may so say, in ever higher and higher spirals, which will rise further and draw in more closely towards the unreached and unattainable Throne of the blessed Himself, "My soul thirsteth"; "my soul is satisfied"; "my satisfied soul still longs and follows."

And then there is also very beautifully here, the cooperation, and reciprocal action of the seeking soul and of the sustaining God. "My soul followeth hard after Thee; Thy right hand upholdeth me." We hold and we are held. We hold because we are held, and we are held while we hold. We follow, and yet He is with us; we long, and yet we possess; we pursue, and yet in the very

act of pursuit we are upheld by His hand. We should not follow unless He held us up. He will not hold us up unless we follow. All controversies of grace and free-will are reconciled and lulled to sleep in these great words.

And now I can but lightly touch upon the last portion of the Psalm, which describes one consequence of pressing after God. The soul thus cleaving and following is gifted with a prophetic certainty. "Those that seek my soul are destined for destruction" (so is the probable rendering); "they shall go into the lower parts of the earth" —swallowed up like Korah and his rebellious company. "They shall each be given up to the power of the sword" (as the words might be rendered); "they shall be a portion for foxes" (or *jackals*, as the word means). Their unburied bodies shall lie in the wilderness, and the jackals shall tear and devour them. David regarded his enemies as God's enemies. David's point of view permitted him to exult with a stern but not unrighteous joy in their destruction. But these words are not prayer nor imprecation, but prophecy and the insight of a soul conscious of union with God, and therefore assured that everything which stands in the way of its possession of God Whom it loves is destined for annihilation.

And, disengaging the words from the mere husk and shell of Old Testament experience, all of us, if we cleave to God, may have this confidence, that nothing can hinder our fellowship with God; and that whatsoever stands in the way of our closer union with Him shall be swept out of the way. David's certainty of the destruction of his foes is the same triumphant assurance, on a lower spiritual level, as Paul's trumpet-blast of victory. "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Nay, in all these things,"—and over all

these things—"we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

There is the other side of this prophetic certainty here. "The king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by Him shall glory." He and his faithful followers shall realise a divine deliverance, which shall be the subject of their praise; and the adversary's lips shall be sealed with silence, their vindication shall stick in their throat, and they shall be dumb before the judgment of Almighty God. That confidence too may stand as a symbol of the certainty of hope which refreshes the soul which seeks and possesses God, even in the wilderness and while compassed with sorrows and fears. We, too, may find in our present union with God a prophecy fixed and firm as the pillars of His throne, of our future kingly dignity, and rapturous joy in Him. It is reserved not for us only but for all whose lips confessed Him on earth and shall therefore be opened to lift up before Him triumphant praise, which shall drown the discords of opposing voices, and no more be broken by sobs or weeping.

My brother! we are all thirsty. Do you know what it is that makes you restless? Do you know Who it is that you need? Listen to Him that says: "If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink." Choose whether you will be tortured with mad and aimless cravings, and perish in a dry land; or whether you will come to the Fountain of Life in Christ your Saviour, and slake your thirst at God Himself.

"CAIAPHAS."

SERMON XXI.

"CAIAPHAS."

"And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."—JOHN xi. 49, 50.

THE resurrection of Lazarus had raised a wave of popular excitement. Any stir amongst the people was dangerous, especially at the Passover time, which was nigh at hand, when Jerusalem would be filled with crowds of men, ready to take fire from any spark that might fall amongst them. So a hasty meeting of the principal ecclesiastical council of the Jews was summoned, in order to discuss the situation, and concert measures for repressing the nascent enthusiasm. One might have expected to find there some disposition to inquire honestly into the claims of a Teacher Who had such a witness to His claims as a man alive that had been dead. But nothing of the sort appears in their ignoble calculations. Like all weak men, they feel that "something must be done," and are perfectly unable to say what. They admit Christ's miracles. "This man doeth many miracles"; but they are not a bit the nearer to recognising His mission, being therein disobedient to their law and untrue to their office. They fear that any disturbance will bring Rome's heavy

hand down on them, and lead to the loss of what national life they still possess. But even that fear is not patriotism nor religion. It is pure self-interest. "They will take away *our* place"—the Temple, probably—"and our nation." The holy things were, in their eyes, their special property. And so, at this supreme moment, big with the fate of themselves and of their nation, their whole anxiety is about personal interests. They hesitate, and are at a loss what to do.

But however they may hesitate, there is one man that knows his own mind—Caiaphas, the high priest. He has no doubt as to what is the right thing to do. He has the advantage of a perfectly clear and single purpose, and no sort of restraint of conscience or delicacy keeps him from speaking it out. He is impatient at their vacillation, and he brushes it all aside with the brusque and contemptuous speech: "Ye know nothing at all!" "The one point of view for us to have is our own interests. Let us have that clearly understood; when we once ask what is 'expedient for us,' there will be no doubt about the answer. This man must die! Never mind about His miracles, or His teaching, or the beauty of His character. His life is a perpetual danger to our prerogatives. I vote for death!"

And so he clashes his advice down into the middle of their waverings, like a piece of iron into yielding water; and the strong man, restrained by no conscience, and speaking out cynically the thought that is floating in all their minds, but which they dare not utter, is master of the situation, and the resolve is taken. "From that day forth" they determined to put Him to death.

But John regards this selfish, cruel advice as a prophecy. Caiaphas spoke wiser things than he knew. The Divine Spirit breathed in strange fashion through even such lips as his, and moulded his savage utterance into

such a form as that it became a fit expression for the very deepest thought about the nature and the power of Christ's death. He did indeed die for that people—thinks the Evangelist—even though they have rejected him, and the dreaded Romans *have* come and taken away our place and nation—but his death had a wider purpose, and was not for that nation only, but that also "He should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad."

Let us, then, take these two aspects of the man and his counsel: the unscrupulous priest and his savage advice; the unconscious prophet and his great prediction.

I.—First, then, let us take the former point of view, and think of this unscrupulous priest and his savage advice. "It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Remember who he was, the high priest of the nation, with Aaron's mitre on his brow, and centuries of illustrious traditions embodied in his person; set by his very office to tend the sacred flame of their Messianic hopes, and with pure hands and heart to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people; the head and crown of the national religion, in whose heart justice and mercy should have found a sanctuary if they had fled from all others; whose ears ought to have been opened to the faintest whisper of the voice of God; whose lips should ever have been ready to witness for the truth.

And see what he is! A crafty schemer, as blind as a mole to the beauty of Christ's character and the greatness of His words; utterly unspiritual; undisguisedly selfish; rude as a boor; cruel as a cut-throat; and having reached that supreme height of wickedness in which he can dress his ugliest thought in the plainest words, and send them into the world unabashed. What a lesson this speech of Caiaphas, and the character disclosed by it, read to all

persons who have a professional connection with religion!

He can take one point of view only, in regard of the mightiest spiritual revelation that the world ever saw; and that is, its bearing upon his own miserable personal interests, and the interests of the order to which he belongs. And so, whatever may be the wisdom, or miracles, or goodness of Jesus, because He threatens the prerogatives of the priesthood, He must die and be got out of the way.

This is only an extreme case of a temper and a tendency which is perennial. Popes and inquisitors and priests of all Churches have done the same, in their degree, in all ages. They have always been tempted to look upon religion and religious truth and religious organisations as existing somehow for their personal advantage. And so "the Church is in danger!" generally means "my position is threatened," and heretics are got rid of, because their teaching is inconvenient for the prerogatives of a priesthood; and new truth is fought against because officials do not see how it harmonises with their pre-eminence.

It is not popes and priests and inquisitors only that are examples of the tendency. The warning is needed by every man who stands in such a position as mine, whose business it is professionally to handle sacred things, and to administer Christian institutions and Christian ritual. All such men are tempted to look upon the truth as their stock-in-trade, and to fight against innovations, and to array themselves instinctively against progress, and frown down new aspects and new teachers of truth, simply because they threaten, or appear to threaten, the position and prerogatives of the teachers that be. Caiaphas' sin is possible, and Caiaphas' tempation is actual, for every man whose profession it is to handle the oracles of God.

But the lessons of this speech and character are for us

all. Caiaphas' sentence is an undisguised, unblushing avowal of a purely selfish standpoint. It is not a common depth of degradation to stand up, and without a blush, to say: "I look at all my claims of revelation, at all my professedly spiritual truth, and at everything else, from one delightfully simple point of view—I ask myself, how does it bear upon what I think to be my advantage?" What a deal of perplexity a man is saved if he takes up that position! Yes! and how he has damned himself in the very act of doing it! For, look what this absorbing and exclusive self-regard does in the illustration before us, and let us learn what it will do to ourselves.

This selfish consideration of our own interests will make us as blind as bats to the most radiant beauty of truth; ay, and to Christ Himself, if the recognition of Him and of His message seems to threaten any of these. They tell us that fishes which live in the water of caverns get to lose their eyesight; and men that are always living in the dark holes of their own selfish, absorbed natures, they, too, lose their spiritual sight; and the fairest, loftiest, truest and most radiant visions (which are realities) pass before their eyes, and they see them not. When you put on regard for yourselves as they used to do blinkers upon horses, you have no longer the power of wide, comprehensive vision, but only see straight forward upon the narrow line which you fancy is marked out by your own interests. If ever there comes into the selfish man's mind a truth, or an aspect of Christ's mission which may seem to cut against some of his practices or interests, how blind he is to it! When Lord Nelson was at Copenhagen, and they hoisted the signal of recall, he put his telescope up to his blind eye and said, "I do not see it!" And that is exactly what this self-absorbed regard to our own interests does with hundreds of men who do not in the least degree know it. It blinds them to the

plain will of the commander-in-chief flying there at the masthead. "There are none so blind as those who will not see;" and there are none who so certainly will not see as those who have an uneasy suspicion that if they do see they will have to change their tack. So I say, look at the instance before us, and learn the lesson of the blindness to truth and beauty, which are Christ Himself, which comes of a regard to one's own interests.

Then again, this same self-regard may bring a man down to any kind and degree of wrong-doing. Caiaphas was brought down by it, being the supreme judge of his nation, to be an assassin and an accomplice of murderers. And it is only a question of accident and of circumstances how far that man will descend who once yields himself up to the guidance of such a disposition and tendency. We have all of us to fight against the developed selfishness which takes the form of this, that, and the other sin; and we have all of us, if we are wise, to fight against the undeveloped sin which lies in all selfishness. Remember this! If you begin with laying down as the canon of your conduct—"It is expedient for me," you have got upon an inclined plane that tilts at a very sharp angle, and is very sufficiently greased, and ends away down yonder in the depths of darkness and of death, and it is only a question of time how far and how fast, deep, and irrevocable will be your descent.

And lastly, this same way of looking at things which takes "It is expedient" as the determining consideration, has in it an awful power of so twisting and searing a man's conscience as that he comes to view the evil and never to know that there is anything wrong in it. This cynical high priest in our text had no conception that he was doing anything but obeying the plainest dictates of the most natural self-preservation when he gave his opinion that they had better kill Christ than have any

danger to their priesthood. The crime of the actual crucifixion was diminished because the doers were so unconscious that it was a crime; but the crime of the process by which they had come to be unconscious—oh! how that was increased and deepened. So, if we fix our eyes sharply and exclusively on what makes for our own advantage, and take that as the point of view from which we determine our conduct, we may, and we shall, bring ourselves into such a condition as that our consciences will cease to be sensitive to right and wrong; and we shall do all manner of bad things, and never know it. We shall "wipe our mouths and say: 'I have done no harm.'" So, I beseech you, remember this, that to live for self is hell, and that the only antagonist of such selfishness, which leads to blindness, crime, and a seared conscience, is to yield ourselves to the love of God in Jesus Christ, and to say:—"I live, yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me."

II.—And now turn briefly to the second aspect of this saying, into which the former, if I may so say, melts away. We have the unconscious prophet and his great prediction.

The Evangelist conceives that the man who filled the office of high priest, being the head of the theocratic community, was naturally the medium of a Divine oracle. When he says, "being the high priest *that year*, Caiaphas prophesied," he does not imply that the high priestly office was annual, but simply desires to mark the fateful importance of that year for the history of the world and the priesthood. "In that year" the great "High Priest for ever" came and stood for a moment by the side of the earthly high priest—the Substance by the shadow—and by His offering of Himself as the one Sacrifice for sin for ever, deprived priesthood and sacrifice henceforward of all their validity. So that Caiaphas was in

reality the last of the high priests, and those that succeeded him for something less than half a century were but like ghosts that walked after cock-crow. And what the Evangelist would mark is the importance of "that year," as making Caiaphas ever memorable to us. Solemn and strange that the long line of Aaron's priesthood ended in such a man; the river in a putrid morass; and that of all the years in the history of the nation, "in that year" should such a person fill such an office!

"Being high priest he prophesied." And was there anything strange in a bad man's prophesying? Did not the Spirit of God breathe through Balaam of old? Is there anything incredible in a man's prophesying unconsciously? Did not Pilate, when he nailed over the Cross: "This is the King of the Jews," and wrote it in Hebrew, and in Greek, and in Latin, conceive himself to be perpetrating a rude jest, and was he not proclaiming an everlasting truth? When the Pharisees stood at the foot of the Cross and taunted Him, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," did they not, too, speak deeper things than they knew? And were not the lips of this unworthy, selfish, unspiritual, unscrupulous, cruel priest so used as that, all unconsciously, his words lent themselves to the proclamation of the glorious central truth of Christianity, that Christ died for the nation that slew Him and rejected Him, nor for them alone, but for all the world? Look, though but for a moment, at the thoughts that come from this new view of the words which we have been considering.

They suggest to us, first of all, the twofold aspect of Christ's death. From the human point of view it was a savage murder by forms of law for political ends; Caiaphas and the priests slaying Him to avoid a popular tumult that might threaten their prerogatives, Pilate consenting to His death to avoid the unpopularity that might follow

a refusal. From the Divine point of view it is God's great sacrifice for the sin of the world. It is the most signal instance of that solemn law of Providence which runs all through the history of the world, whereby bad men's bad deeds, strained through the fine network, as it were, of the Divine providence, lose their poison and become nutritious and fertilising. "Thou makest the wrath of men to praise Thee; with the residue thereof Thou girdest Thyself." The greatest crime ever done in the world is the greatest blessing ever given to the world. Man's sin works out the loftiest Divine purpose, even as the coral insects blindly building up the reef that keeps back the waters, or, as the sea in its wild, impotent rage, seeking to overwhelm the land, only throws upon the beach a barrier that confines its waves and curbs their fury.

Then, again, this second aspect of the counsel of Caiaphas suggests for us the twofold consequences of that death on the nation itself. This Gospel of John was probably written after the destruction of Jerusalem. By the time that our Evangelist penned these words "the Romans *had* come and taken away their place and their nation." The thing that Caiaphas and his party had, by their short-sighted policy, tried to prevent had been brought about by the very deed itself. For Christ's death was practically the reason for the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth. When "the husbandmen said, Come! let us kill Him, and seize on the inheritance," which is simply putting Caiaphas' counsel into other language, they thereby deprived themselves of the inheritance. And so Christ's death is the destruction and not the salvation of the nation.

And yet, it was true that He died for that people, for every man of them, for Caiaphas as truly as for John, for Judas as truly as for Peter, for all the Scribes and the Pharisees that mocked round His cross, as truly as for the

women that stood silently weeping there. He died for them all. And John, looking back upon the destruction of his nation, can yet say: "He died for that people." Yes! And just because He did, and because they rejected Him, His death, which they would not let be their salvation, became their destruction and their ruin. Oh! brethren, it is always so! "He is either a Savour of life unto life, or a Savour of death unto death!" "Behold! I lay in Zion for a foundation, a tried stone." Build upon it and you are safe. If you do not build upon it, that stone becomes "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." You must either build upon Christ or fall over Him; you must either build *upon* Christ, or be crushed to powder *under* Him. Make your choice! the twofold effect is wrought ever, but we can choose which of the two shall be wrought upon us.

Lastly, we have here the twofold sphere in which our Lord's mighty death works its effects.

I have already said that this Gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem. The whole tone of it shows that the conception of the Church as quite separate from Judaism was firmly established. The narrower national system had been shivered, and from out of the dust and hideous ruin of its crushing fall had emerged the fairer reality of a Church as wide as the world. The Temple on Zion—which was but a small building after all—had been burned with fire. It was *their* place, as Caiaphas called it. But the clearing away of the narrower edifice had revealed the rising walls of the great temple, the Christian Church, whose roof over-arches every land, and in whose courts all men may stand and praise the Lord. So John, in his home in Ephesus, surrounded by flourishing churches in which Jews formed a small and ever-decreasing element, recognised how far the dove with the olive-branch in its mouth flew, and how certainly that

nation was only a little fragment of the many for whom Christ died.

"The children of God that were scattered abroad" were all to be united round that Cross. Yes! the only thing that unites men together is their common relation to a Divine Redeemer. That bond is deeper than all national bonds, than all blood-bonds, than community of race, than family, than friendship, than social ties, than community of opinion, than community of purpose and action. It is destined to absorb them all. All these are transitory and they are imperfect; men wander isolated notwithstanding them all. But if we are knit to Christ, we are knit to all who are also knit to Him. One life animates all the limbs, and one life's blood circulates through all the veins. So also is Christ. We are one in Him, in whom all the body fitly joined together maketh increase, and in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth. If we have yielded to the power of that Cross which draws us to itself, we shall have been more utterly alone, in our penitence and in our conscious surrender to Christ, than ever we were before. But He sets the solitary in families, and that solemn experience of being alone with our Judge and our Saviour will be followed by the blessed sense that we are no more solitary, but "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God."

That death brings men into the *family* of God. He will "gather into one the scattered children of God." They are called children by anticipation. For surely nothing can be clearer than that the doctrine of all John's writings is that men are not children of God by virtue of their humanity, except in the inferior sense of being made by Him, and in His image as creatures with spirit and will, but *become* children of God through faith in the Son of God, which brings about that new birth, whereby we

become partakers of the Divine Nature. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

So I beseech you, turn yourselves to that dear Christ Who has died for us all, for us each, for me and for thee; and put your confidence in His great sacrifice. You will find that you pass from isolation into society, from death into life, from the death of selfishness into the life of God. Listen to Him, who says:—"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice: and there shall be one flock" because there is "one Shepherd."

"THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD."

SERMON XXII.

"THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD."

"The glorious gospel of the blessed God."—1 TIM. i. 11.

TWO remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for our consideration of this text. The first is that the proper rendering is that which is given in the Revised Version,—"the gospel of the glory," not the "glorious gospel." The Apostle is not telling us what kind of thing the Gospel is, but what it is about. He is dealing not with its quality but with its contents. It is a Gospel which reveals, has to do with, is the manifestation of, the glory of God.

Then the other remark is with reference to the meaning of the word "blessed." There are two Greek words which are both translated "blessed" in the New Testament. One of them, the more common, literally means "well spoken of," and points to the action of praise or benediction; describes what a man is when men speak well of him, or what God is when men praise and magnify His name. But the other word, which is used here, and is only applied to God once more in Scripture, has no reference to the human attribution of blessing and praise to Him, but describes Him altogether apart from what

men say of him, as what He is in Himself, the "blessed," or, as we might almost say, the "happy" God. If the word happy seems too trivial, suggesting ideas of levity, of turbulence, of possible change, then I do not know that we can find any better word than that which is already employed in my text, if only we remember that it means the solemn, calm, restful, perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God.

So much, then, being premised, there are three points that seem to me to come out of this remarkable expression of my text. First, the revelation of God in Christ of which the Gospel is the record, is the glory of God. Second, that revelation is, in a very profound sense, the blessedness of God. And, lastly, that revelation is the good news for men. Let us look at these three points, then, in succession.

I.—Take, first, that striking thought that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the glory of God.

The theme, or contents, or the purpose of the whole Gospel, is to set forth and make manifest to men the Glory of God.

Now what do we mean by "the glory"? I think, perhaps, that question may be most simply answered by remembering the definite meaning of the word in the Old Testament. There it designates, usually, that supernatural and lustrous light which dwelt between the cherubim, the symbol of the presence and of the self-manifestation of God. So that we may say, in brief, that the glory of God is the sum-total of the light that streams from His self-revelation, considered as being the object of adoration and praise by a world that gazes upon Him.

And if this be the notion of the glory of God, is it not a startling contrast which is suggested between the apparent contents and the real substance of that Gospel? Suppose a man, for instance, who had no previous know-

ledge of Christianity, being told that in it he would find the highest revelation of the glory of God. He comes to the Book, and finds that the very heart of it is not about God, but about a man; that this revelation of the glory of God is the biography of a man; and more than that, that the larger portion of that biography is the story of the humiliations, and the sufferings, and the death of the man. Would it not strike him as a strange paradox that the history of a *man's* life was the shining apex of all revelations of the glory of *God?* And yet so it is, and the Apostle, just because to him the Gospel was the story of the Christ Who lived and died, declares that in this story of a human life, patient, meek, limited, despised, rejected, and at last crucified, lies, brighter than all other flashings of the Divine light, the very heart of the lustre and palpitating centre and fontal source of all the radiance with which God has flooded the world. The history of Jesus Christ is the glory of God. And that involves two or three considerations on which I dwell briefly.

One of them is this: Christ, then, is the self-revelation of God. If, when we deal with the story of His life and death, we are dealing simply with the biography of a man, however pure, lofty, inspired he may be, then I ask what sort of connection there is between that biography which the four Gospels gives us, and what my text says is the substance of the Gospel? What force of logic is there in the Apostle's words: "God commendeth *His* love toward us in that whilst we were yet sinners *Christ* died for us," unless there is some altogether different connection between the God Who commends His love and the Christ who dies to commend it, than exists between a mere man and God? Brethren! to deliver my text and a hundred other passages of Scripture from the charge of being extravagant nonsense and clear, illogical *non sequiturs*, you

must believe that in that Man Christ Jesus "we behold His glory—the glory of the only begotten of the Father"; and that when we look—haply not without some touch of tenderness and awed admiration in our hearts—upon His gentleness we have to say, "the patient God"; when we look upon His tears we have to say, "the pitying God"; when we look upon His cross we have to say, "the redeeming God"; and gazing upon the Man, see in Him the manifest Divinity. Oh! listen to that voice, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," and bow before the story of the human life as being the revelation of the indwelling God.

And then, still further, my text suggests that this self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the very climax and highest point of all God's revelations to men. I believe that the loftiest exhibition and conception of the Divine character which is possible to us must be made to us in the form of a man. I believe that the law of humanity, for ever, in Heaven as on earth, is this, that the Son is the Revealer of God; and that no loftier—yea, at bottom, no other—communication of the Divine nature can be made to man than is made in Jesus Christ.

But be that as it may, let me urge upon you this thought, that in that wondrous story of the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ the very high-water mark of Divine self-communication has been touched and reached. All the energies of the Divine nature are embodied there. The "riches, both of the *wisdom* and of the *knowledge* of God," are in the Cross and Passion of our Saviour. "To declare at this time his *righteousness*" Jesus Christ came to die. The Cross is "the *power* of God unto salvation." Or, to put it into other words, and avail oneself of an illustration, we know the old story of the queen who, for the love of an unworthy human heart, dissolved pearls in the cup and gave them to him to drink.

We may say that God comes to us, and for the love of us, reprobate and unworthy, has melted all the jewels of His nature into that cup of blessing which He offers to us, saying: "Drink ye all of it." The whole God-head, so to speak, is smelted down to make that rushing river of molten love which flows from the Cross of Christ into the hearts of men. Here is the highest point of God's revelation of Himself.

And my text implies, still further, that the true living, flashing centre of the glory of God is the love of God. Christendom is more than half heathen yet, and it betrays its heathenism not least in its vulgar conceptions of the Divine nature and its glory. The majestic attributes which separate God from man, and make Him unlike His creatures, are the ones which people too often fancy belong to the glorious side of His character. They draw distinctions between "grace" and "glory," and think that the latter applies mainly to what I might call the physical and the metaphysical, and less to the moral, attributes of the Divine nature. We adore power, and when it is expanded to infinity we think that it is the glory of God. But my text delivers us from all such misconceptions. If we rightly understand it, then we learn this, that the true heart of the glory is tenderness and love. Of power that weak Man hanging on the cross is a strange embodiment; but if we learn that there is something more godlike in God than power, then we can say, as we look upon Jesus Christ: "Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us." Not in the wisdom that knows no growth, not in the knowledge which has no border-land of ignorance ringing it round about, not in the unwearied might of His arm, not in the exhaustless energy of His being, not in the unslumbering watchfulness of His all-seeing eye, not in that awful Presence wheresoever creatures are, not in any or in all of these lies the glory of

God, but in His love. These are the fringes of the brightness; this is the central blaze. The Gospel is the Gospel of the glory of God, because it is all summed up in the one word,—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

II.—Now, in the next place, **the revelation of God in Christ is the blessedness of God.**

We are come here into places where we see but very dimly, and it becomes us to speak very cautiously. Only as we are led by the Divine teaching may we affirm at all. But it cannot be unwise to accept in simple literality utterances of Scripture, however they may seem to strike us as strange. And so I would say—the philosopher's God may be all-sufficient and unemotional, the Bible's God "delighteth in mercy," rejoiceth in His gifts, and is glad when men accept them. It is something, surely, amid all the griefs and sorrows of this sorrow-haunted and devil-hunted world, to rise to this lofty region and to feel that there is a living personal Joy at the heart of the universe. If we went no further, to me there is infinite beauty and mighty consolation and strength in that one thought—the happy God. He is not, as some ways of representing Him figure Him to be, what the older astronomers thought the sun was, a great cold orb, black and frigid at the heart, though the source and centre of light and warmth to the system. But He Himself is Joy, or if we dare not venture on that word, which brings with it earthly associations, and suggests the possibility of alteration—He is the blessed God. And the Psalmist saw deeply into the Divine nature, who, not contented with hymning His praise as the Possessor of the fountain of life, and the Light whereby we see light, exclaimed in an ecstasy of anticipation, "Thou makest us to drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures."

But there is a great deal more than that here, if not in

the word itself, at least in its connection, which connection seems to suggest that howsoever the Divine nature must be supposed to be blessed in its own absolute and boundless perfectness, an element in the blessedness of God Himself arises from His self-communication through the Gospel to the world. All love delights in imparting. Why should not God's? On the lower level of human affection we know that it is so, and on the highest level we may with all reverence venture to say, The quality of that mercy . . . . "is twice blest," and that Divine love "blesseth Him that gives and them that take."

He created a universe because He delights in His works and in having creatures on whom He can lavish Himself. He "rests in His love, and rejoices over us with singing" when we open our hearts to the reception of His light, and learn to know Him as He has declared Himself in His Christ. The blessed God is blessed because He is God. But He is blessed too because He is the loving and therefore the giving God.

What a rock-firmness such a thought as this gives to the mercy and the love that He pours out upon us! If they were evoked by our worthiness we might well tremble, but when we know, according to the grand words familiar to many of us, that it is His nature and property to be merciful, and that He is far gladder in giving than we can be in receiving, then we may be sure that His mercy endureth for ever, and that it is the very necessity of His being—and He cannot turn His back upon Himself—to love, to pity, to succour, and to bless.

III.—And so, lastly, the revelation of God in Christ is good news for us all.

"The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." How that word "gospel" has got tarnished and enfeebled by constant use and unreflective use, so that it slips glibly off my tongue and falls without producing any effect

upon your hearts. It needs to be freshened up by considering what really it means. It means this: here are we like men shut up in a beleaguered city, hopeless, helpless, with no power to break out or to raise the seige; provisions failing, death certain. Some of you older men and women remember how that was the case in that awful siege of Paris, in the Franco-German War, and what expedients were adopted in order to get some communication from without. And here to us, prisoned, comes, as it did to them, a despatch borne under a Dove's wing, and the message is this:—God is love; and that you may know that He is, He has sent you His Son Who died on the Cross, the sacrifice for a world's sin. Believe it and trust it, and all your transgressions will pass away.

My brother, is not that good news? Is it not *the* good news that you need—the news of a Father, of pardon, of hope, of love, of strength, of purity, of Heaven? Does it not meet our fears, our forebodings, our wants at every point? It comes to you. What do you do with it? Do you welcome it eagerly, do you clutch it to your hearts, do you say, "This is *my* Gospel"? Oh! let me beseech you, welcome the message; do not turn away from the Word from Heaven, which will bring life and blessedness to all your hearts! Some of you have turned away long enough, some of you, perhaps, are fighting with the temptation to do so again even now. Let me press that ancient Gospel upon your acceptance, that Christ the Son of God has died for you, and lives to bless and help you Take it and live! So shall you find that "as cold water to a thirsty soul, so is this best of all news from the far country."

"LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH."

SERMON XXIII.

"LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH."

"Like precious faith with us. —2 Peter i. 1.

SOME of you may be aware that many scholars have denied that this Epistle was written by the Apostle Peter. There are a great many reasons, which I think valid, for accepting it as genuine, and amongst them is the occurrence of certain characteristic phrases in both of the Epistles which go by that Apostle's name.

This word "precious" is one of these. We read in the first Epistle of "the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." And a few verses further on, we read, of "the precious blood of Christ." In the next chapter we have a quotation from Isaiah interpreted of Christ—"A chief corner-stone, elect, precious," which "preciousness," according to the more accurate rendering of the Revised Version, is in the next verse said to belong to believers. In the second Epistle we find this phrase of our text, "like precious faith," and in an immediately following verse we read of "exceeding great and precious promises."

Thus there runs through both letters the use of the same characteristic and somewhat indefinite epithet, which

expresses only the Apostle's lofty idea of the value of the themes with which he is dealing. The old man getting near the end of his life had come to think that the really valuable things were not the things which can be handled, counted and weighed; that the truly precious things were these—Christ, His blood, God's promises, and the faith which grasps these three. These are worth all the rest; and as for the rest—well, if you have them you are not much the better, and if you have not them you are very little the worse.

But my text not only speaks of "*precious* faith," but of "*like precious* faith with us." And the question is, who are the two classes whose faith is here declared to be of equal worth? One answer may be that the "us" means Peter and his brother Apostles, and if so, then we have here a declaration of the substantial identity and equal value of the faith of all Christian people, whether they hold the highest office or fill the most undistinguished place in the Church.

But more probably the two classes referred to here are the Gentile Christians to whom the letter was addressed, and the Jewish Christians, with whom Peter classes himself. In the name of all the latter he welcomes the "uncircumcision" into the unity of the Church, and recognises them as possessors of the same faith, and, therefore, enriched with the same salvation. He proclaims that the wall of partition is broken down, and stretches his hand across its ruins to grasp his brethren's hands. He is back again to the old lesson which he learned on the house-top at Joppa and in the dwelling of Cornelius. It is the reiteration of his own argument with which he had quieted the suspicions of the Church at Jerusalem when they heard of his baptism of Cornelius. "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could with-

stand God?" Although the old national bigotry had conquered him for awhile, and he had been unfaithful to his earlier convictions, he has returned to them, and is side by side with "his beloved brother Paul" in the assertion of the abolition of all national prerogative, and the inclusion on equal terms within the Church of all men, be they of what race they may, if only they possess faith in Jesus Christ.

Such being the force and bearing of these words, we may use them as suggesting some not unimportant points, which throw light upon that much spoken about, but often dimly understood, subject of Faith, especially in regard of its object, its value, and its substantial identity under the most different forms.

I.—Consider then, first, the object of faith, as here defined.

The Authorised Version reads, "To them that have obtained like precious faith with us *through* the righteousness of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ." But the Revised Version reads more accurately, "faith . . . . *in* the righteousness." The former rendering is admissible, and would give the meaning that God's righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ gave occasion for our faith, which would be quite true, inasmuch as if there had been no righteousness revealed, there could have been no faith. But that meaning is less satisfactory than the other, which regards the righteousness as being the object of our faith. As Paul says, "The righteousness of God from faith is revealed unto faith."

Now the object of faith is much more frequently said in the New Testament to be Jesus Christ, and it is all-important to keep clearly in view that He, the personal Christ, is the true and proper object of our faith. Faith is trust, and the object of trust must be a person. We may say that we trust a promise, but that really means that we

trust him who has made it. We may believe a creed, but for trust we must have a living God of Whom the creed speaks. It is Christ Himself, then, in the sweetness and graciousness of His character, in the sacrifice of His death, and in the glory of His risen life, Whom we trust in, and by trusting in Whom we live.

That principle is important as bringing clearly into view how faith in Christ is strictly parallel with our trust in one another. It is the very same act which knits us to Christ, and to God in Christ, and which knits us to one another. It is faith which makes it possible that the world should go on at all. The same confidence with which men of business rely upon each other in their transactions, the same confidence with which we in our families safely trust in the love and truth of wife or husband, friend or child, when directed to Jesus Christ becomes the spring and the heart of all religion.

What tragic folly and waste it is that we should squander the treasure of our trust on such unworthy objects, when we might safely lodge it in the safe keeping of His Almighty hands! The vine which trails along the ground and twines its tendrils round any rubbish which it may come upon, is sure to be trodden under foot. If it lift itself from the earth and fling its clasping rings round the shaft of the Cross, its stem will not be bruised, and its clusters will be heavier and sweeter. The tendrils which anchor it to the rubbish heap are the same as those which clasp it to the Cross. The trust with which we lean upon the bruised reeds of human help is the same as that with which we lean upon the iron pillar of a Saviour's aid. Faith is trust, and its object is not a creed, but a person, whom it is the work of all creeds to make known.

That being understood, then comes the importance of the words of my text. A man may say:—"Oh! I trust in Christ, I am a Christian;" but the whole question is:

—What Christ is it that you are trusting in, and what is it that you are trusting to Him for? So, in order to make definite the vagueness which may attach to the thought of faith in a person, unless we declare what the person is, we have to keep in view such sayings as this of my text. The Apostle Paul, for example, speaks in one place of "faith in His blood," and his brother Peter here speaks of "faith in the righteousness of God and Christ." If we take these two definitions of the object of faith, they explain what true faith in Christ has to lay hold of. If you are truly trusting in Christ you are trusting in His blood; if you are truly trusting in Christ you are trusting in His righteousness. If your faith, so-called, lays hold on a Christ Whose blood is nothing to you, Whose righteousness is to you only example and stimulus, and no more, my brother! you have not got the "like precious faith" with those of whom the Apostle is the representative. The Christ Whom we must trust is the Christ Whose blood cleanses from all sin, Whose righteousness makes us righteous. And the great truths that He, by His perfect obedience, has fulfilled the law, that by His death we are justified, and that by His indwelling in us we are sanctified, are all summed up in this word of my text, which declares the object of faith to be the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

There is much need, I think, in these days, when so much foolish impatience of doctrine has crept into the professing Church, and when some men are so afraid of anything that savours of that great truth of a dying Christ Whose blood is our righteousness, to say plainly that not only must our faith grasp Jesus, but that our faith must grasp this Jesus,—the Jesus that died for our sins and was raised again for our justification—if we are ever to be "found in Him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ."

II.—Now, still further consider the worth of this faith.

What is the value of faith? Why is it so precious? I have already pointed out that in both these letters certain things are declared to be precious, and I enumerated them as being Christ Himself, Christ's blood, and God's great promises. These are precious in one way by virtue of their own inherent value. But faith is only precious because of that which it lays hold of.

So that is the first item in the preciousness of faith—its worth as a *channel.* You remember that in one place we read about "the door of faith." What is the worth of a door? It is only a hole in a wall. The value of the door is in that which it admits or in that which it is the means of our entering into. So faith is precious, not because of anything in itself, for it is nothing in itself, but because of what it grips and grasps, and of what it admits into our hearts.

Just as the hand of a dyer that has been working with crimson will be crimson; just as the hand that has been holding fragrant perfumes will be perfumed; so my faith, which is only the hand by which I lay hold upon precious things, will take the tincture and the fragrance of what it grasps. A bit of earthenware piping may be worth a few pence in intrinsic value, but if it is the means by which water is brought into a besieged city which else would perish with thirst, who will estimate its worth? In like manner, faith is precious because it brings God in Christ, and the blood of Christ and the promises of Christ, all flooding into my soul to fill it with life, and fruitfulness, and refreshing. It is the hand which lays hold on the hand of God that He may hold me up. It is the taking down of the shutters that the sunshine may come in. Which lights the room, the removal of the shutters or the sunshine? Which is the precious thing, the faith or

the Christ that rises on the faithful soul with "healing in His beams"? It is the grasping of the poles of the electric battery, powerful only as bringing me into contact with the quick and quickening impulse. Faith brings all riches to me, and therefore is itself gilded with some reflection of their lustre, and partakes of their preciousness.

Then again we may consider the worth of faith as a *defence*. We read of the "shield of faith." How is faith valuable as a shield? Has it any power of protection in itself? Am I any the safer merely because I am confident that I am? A man may have an obstinate confidence which is misplaced and may lull him into a fatal security. I do not become safe by believing myself to be so, however strong may be the imagination or the fancy. All depends upon what it is that I am relying on. So, then, faith is no shield in itself; it has no power to protect you from anything, either from dangers without or dangers within. "The Lord God is a Sun and Shield. O Lord of Hosts, Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." Thrust your arm, howsoever feeble it may be, through the handles of that great Buckler, and hide yourself behind Him, and "He will cover your head in the day of battle."

Loose things on the deck of a ship will be blown overboard when the storm comes. There is only one way to keep them firm, and that is to lash them to something that is fixed. It is not the bit of rope that gives them security, but it is the stable thing to which they are lashed. Lash yourselves to Christ by faith, and whatever storm or tempest comes, you will be safe, and stand firm and immovable. Your faith is precious because it knits you to His immortal stability.

And in like manner we may consider the worth of faith as a *purifier*. When Peter had to defend himself before the Church in Jerusalem for his action in regard

to Cornelius, his one plea was, "God . . . put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." But how does faith purify? Is there anything in my confidence which will make me pure? No! there is no moral efficacy in the mere act of trust. All depends upon what it is that you are trusting to. You will get like the object of your confidence. If you are trusting to money you will get jaundiced with it. If you are trusting to creatures, the great law will come true about you which has determined the degradation of all idolatrous nations:—"they that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them." As the man's trust, so will the man one day become. The only faith that purifies is faith in Him Who is pure. My faith makes me clean only in the measure in which, and because, it joins me to the Christ Who Himself is righteous, and gives me possession of all the motives to purity which love to Him can set in action, and of all the power for purifying which the gift of His Spirit can bring. Faith is the believing contemplation of Christ in His beauty and graciousness, and every man that hath this confidence in Him does purify himself, because He is pure. Faith is the believing appropriation of that Divine Spirit by Whose mighty operation alone we can become holy and good. And so, brethren, all the value of faith comes from the intrinsic and unspeakable preciousness of these things with which it is conversant.

III.—And now, lastly, my text suggests to us the substantial identity and equal preciousness of faith in all varieties of form and degree.

If we adopt the view that the Apostle is here declaring, that the faith of the Gentile Christian is equally precious with that of the Jew, the door is opened for the recognition of the oneness of faith under the extremest differences of form.

There is no such gulf between any two sects of Christians who have faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ, as there was between the Gentile and the Jewish sections of the primitive Church at the time when this Epistle was written. And yet, says Peter, here is a bridge that can be thrown across that deep gulf, for on both sides of it faith may be identical. Let us learn that two men who both alike are trusting to Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and who are most unlike each other in all other respects, in creed, in culture, in general outlook on the world, in disposition and character, are liker each other than a Christian man and a non-Christian, who in all particulars except faith are as like as twins. The deepest thing in every man that has it is his faith in Jesus Christ, and likeness in that brings him near all others who have it, however unlike on the surface their characteristics may be.

But now do not let us run away with the lazy charity, so called, which is often mere poisonous indifference to truth. I will go as far as any man in recognising the substantial identity, under the most different forms of manifestation, of faith in Jesus Christ. The Quaker on that hand, who will have no ritual or ceremony at all, and the Roman Catholic priest on the other, on the steps of the altar, with the incense-smoke curling about him as he sings Mass, may be brothers. And all manner of differences in opinion, in politics, in culture, in race which may separate men from men, are like the cracks upon the surface of a bit of rock, which are an inch deep while the solid mass goes down a thousand feet. But I am not going to pretend that the man whose Christ did not die for him, and whose Christ gives him no righteousness in which he can stand before God, possesses "like precious faith unto us." To say that he does is to worship charity at the expense of truth, and to be a traitor to

the Master for the sake of seeming to be friendly with those who are not His subjects. My brother! The widest charity has no vagueness; all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity are one, but it must be the *Lord* Jesus Christ that they love.

And then in like manner, if my text have the other application to which I have adverted, that of the identity in faith between the Apostles and the humblest believers, that application teaches us the other lesson of the substantial identity of faith under all degrees of attainment. The poor man's half-sovereign, which stands between him and want—his "one ewe lamb," is made of the same gold as Rothschild's millions. Each tiny particle of a magnet, if it be smitten off the whole mass, is magnetic, and sends out influence from its two little poles. And so the smallest and the feeblest faith is one in character, and one in intrinsic value with the loftiest and superbest. Only, as is the measure of the man's faith, so will be the measure of his possession of the precious things.

Therefore, dear brethren, seeing that we may all have that faith which, whether it be as a grain of mustard-seed or whether it be grown to be greater than all herbs, is yet one in its mysterious life; seeing that we may all possess it, and that there are infinitely various degrees in which we may possess it, and consequently infinite increase possible in the good things it brings to us, let us all take that old prayer, and with it the always appropriate confession, "Lord! I believe, help Thou my unbelief." And then, like this very Apostle, if, standing upon the stormy billows, when our hearts are ready to fail us, we "stretch lame hands of faith," and grasp the strong Hand which will be stretched out to us, we shall be held up. His strong hand, not my weakness; His grasp, not mine; Christ, not my faith in Christ, will keep me from falling and present me faultless before the presence of His glory.

SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION.

SERMON XXIV.

SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION.

"If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee." —MATT. xviii. 8. (R.V.)

No person or thing can do our characters as much harm as we ourselves can do. Indeed, none can do them any harm but ourselves. For men may put stumbling-blocks in our way, but it is we who make them stumbling-blocks. The obstacle in the path would do us no hurt if it were not for the erring foot, nor the attractive prize if it were not for the hand that itched to lay hold of it, nor the glittering bauble if it were not for the eye that kindled at the sight of it. So our Lord here, having been speaking about the men that put stumbling-blocks in the way of His little ones, draws the net closer and bids us look at home. A solemn woe of Divine judgment is denounced on those who cause His followers to stumble. Let us leave God to execute that, and be sure that we have no share in their guilt, but let us ourselves be the executioners of the judgment upon the things in ourselves which alone give the stumbling-blocks which others put before us in their fatal power.

There is extraordinary energy in these words. Solemnly they are repeated twice here, verbatim; solemnly they

are repeated verbatim three times in Mark's edition. The urgent stringency of the command, the terrible plainness of the alternative put forth by the lips that could say nothing harsh, and the fact that the very same injunction appears in a wholly different connection in the Sermon on the Mount, show us how profoundly important our Lord felt the principle to be which He was here laying down.

We mark these three points. First, the case supposed, "If thy hand or thy foot cause thee to stumble." Then the sharp, prompt remedy enjoined, "cut them off and cast them from thee." Then the solemn motive by which it is enforced, "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than, being a whole man, to be cast into hell-fire."

I.—First, then, as to the case supposed.

Hand and foot and eye are, of course, regarded as organs of the inward self, and symbols of its tastes and capacities. We may perhaps see in them the familiar distinction between the practical and the theoretical:—hand and foot being instruments of action, and the eye the organ of perception. Our Lord takes an extreme case. If members of the body are to be amputated and plucked out should they cause us to stumble, much more are associations to be abandoned and occupations to be relinquished and pleasures to be forsaken, if these draw us away. But it is to be noticed that the whole stringency of the commandment rests upon that *if*. "*If* they cause thee to stumble," then, and not else, amputate. The powers are natural, the operation of them is perfectly innocent, but a man may be ruined by innocent things. And, says Christ, if that process is begun, then, and only then, does My exhortation come into force.

Now, all that solemn thought of a possible injurious issue of innocent occupations, rests upon the principles, that our nature has an ideal order, so as that some parts

of it are to be suppressed and some are to rule, and that there are degrees of importance in men's pursuits, and that where the lower interfere and clog the operations of the higher, there they are harmful. And so the only wisdom is to excise and cut them off.

We see illustrations in abundance every day. There are plenty of people that are being ruined in regard of the highest purposes of their lives, simply by an over-indulgence in lower occupations which in themselves may be perfectly right. Here is a young woman that spends so much of her day in reading novels that she has no time to look after the house and help her mother. Here is a young man so given to athletics that his studies are neglected—and so you may go all round the circle, and find instances of the way in which innocent things, and the excessive or unwise exercise of natural faculties, are destroying men. And much more is that the case in regard of religion, which is the highest object of pursuit, and in regard of those capacities and powers by which we lay hold of God. These are to be ministered to by the rest, and if there be in my nature or in the order of my life something which is drawing away to itself the energy that ought to go in that other direction, then, howsoever innocent it may be, *per se*, it is harming me. It is a wen that is sucking all the vital force into itself, and turning it into poison. And there is only one cure for it, and that is the knife.

Then there is another point to be observed in this case supposed, and that is that the whole matter is left to the determination of personal experience. Nobody else has a right to decide for you what it is safe and wise for you to do in regard of things which are not in themselves wrong. If they are wrong in themselves, of course the consideration of consequences is out of place altogether; but if they be not wrong in themselves, then it is you that must

settle whether they are legitimate for you or not. Do not let your Christian liberty be interfered with by other people's dictation in regard of this matter. How often you hear people say, "*I* could not do it"; meaning thereby, "therefore *he* ought not to do it!" But that inference is altogether illegitimate. True, there *are* limitations of our Christian liberty in regard of things indifferent and innocent. Paul lays down the most important of these in three sentences. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." "All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." You must think of your brethren as well as of yourself. "All things are lawful for me, yet will I not be brought under the power of any." Keep master of them, and rather abstain altogether than become their slave. But these three limitations being observed, then, in regard of all such matters, nobody else can prescribe for me or you. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

But, on the other hand, do not you be led away into things that damage you because some other man does them, as he supposes, without injury. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." There are some Christian people who are simply very unscrupulous and think themselves very strong; and whose consciences are not more enlightened, but less sensitive than the "narrow-minded brethren" upon whom they look.

And so, dear friend, you ought to take the world—to inhale it, if I may so say, as patients do chloroform; only you must be your own doctor and keep your own fingers on your pulse, and watch the first sign of failure there, and take no more. When the safety lamps begin to burn blue you may be quite sure there is choke-damp about; and when Christian men and women begin to find prayer wearisome, and religious thoughts dull, and the remem-

brance of God an effort or a pain, then, whatever anybody else may do, it is time for them to pull up. "If thy hand offend thee," never mind though your brother's hand is not offending him, do the necessary thing for *your* health, "cut it off and cast it from you."

But of course there must be caution and common-sense in the application of such a principle. It does not mean that we are to abandon all things that are susceptible of abuse, for everything is so; and if we are to regulate our conduct by such a rule, it is not the amputation of a hand that will be sufficient. We may as well cut off our heads at once, and go out of the world altogether; for everything is capable of being thus abused.

Nor does the injunction mean that unconditionally we are to abandon all occupations in which there is danger. It can never be a duty to shirk a duty because it is dangerous. And sometimes it is as much a Christian man's duty to go into, and to stand in positions that are full of temptation and danger, as it is a fireman's business to go into a burning house at the risk of suffocation. There were saints in Cæsar's household, flowers that grew on a dunghill, and they were not bidden to abandon their place because it was full of possible danger to their souls. Sometimes Christ sets His sentinels in places where the bullets fly very thick; and if we are posted in such a place —and we all are so some time or other in our lives—the only thing for us is to stand our ground until the relieving guard comes, and to trust that He said a truth that was always to be true, when He sent out His servants to their dangerous work, with the assurance that if they drank any deadly thing it should not hurt them.

II.—So much, then, for the first of the points here. Now a word, in the second place, as to the sharp remedy enjoined. "Cut it off and cast it from thee."

Entire excision is the only safety. I myself am to be

the agent of that. I am to put my hand upon the block, and with the other hand to grasp the axe and strike. That is to say, we are to suppress capacities, to abandon pursuits, to break with associates when we find that they are damaging our spiritual life and hindering our likeness to Jesus Christ.

That is plain common-sense. Just as in regard of physical intoxication, it is a great deal easier to abstain altogether than to take a very little and then stop. The very fumes will sometimes drive a reclaimed drunkard into a bout of dissipation that will last for weeks. Therefore, the only safety is in entire abstinence. The rule holds in regard to every-day life. Every man has to give up a great many things if he means to succeed in one, and has to be a man of one pursuit if anything worth doing is to be done. Christian men especially have to adopt that principle, and shear off a great deal that is perfectly legitimate, in order that they may keep a reserve of strength for the highest things.

True! all forms of life are capable of being made Christian service and Christian discipline, but in practice we shall find that if we are earnestly seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, not only shall we lose our taste for a great deal that is innocent, but we shall have, whether we lose our taste for it or not—and more imperatively if we have not lost our taste for it than if we have—to give up allowable things in order that with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, we may love and serve our Master. There are no half-measures to be kept; the only thing to do with the viper is to shake it off into the fire and let it burn there. We have to empty our hands of earth's trivialities if we would grasp Christ with them. We have to turn away our eyes from earth if we would behold the Master; and rigidly to apply thisprinciple of excision in order that we may advance

in the Divine life. It is the only way to ensure progress. There is no such certain method of securing an adequate flow of sap up the trunk as to cut off all the suckers. If you want to have a current going down the main bed of the stream, sufficient to keep it clear, you must dam up all the side channels.

Then it is not to be forgotten that this commandment, stringent and necessary as it is, is second best. The man *is* maimed, although it was for Christ's sake that he cut off his hand, or put out his eye. His hand was given him that with it he might serve God, and the highest thing would have been that in hand and foot and eye he should have been anointed, like the priests of old, for the service of his Master. But until he is strong enough to use the faculty for God, the wisest thing is not to use it at all. Abandon the outworks to keep the citadel. And just as men pull down the pretty houses on the outskirts of a fortified city when a siege is impending, in order that they may afford no cover to the enemy, so we have to sweep away a great deal in our lives that is innocent and fair, in order that the foes of our spirit may find no lodgment there. It is second best, but for all that it is absolutely needful. We must lay aside every *weight*, as well as "the *sin* which besets us." We must run lightly if we would run well. We must cast aside all burdens, even though they be burdens of treasure and delights, if we would "run with patience the race that is set before us." "If thy foot offend thee" do not hesitate, do not adopt half-measures, do not try moderation, do not seek to sanctify the use of the peccant member; all that may come in time, but for the present there is only one thing to do—down with it on the block, and off with it! "Cut it off and cast it from thee."

III.—And now, lastly, a word as to the solemn exhortation by which this injunction is enforced.

Christ rests His command of self-denial and self-mutilation upon the highest ground of self-interest. "It is better for thee." We are told nowadays that it is a very low motive to appeal to, that Christianity is a religion of selfishness, because it says to men, "Your life or your death depends upon your faith and your conduct." Well, I think it will be time for us to listen to fantastic objections of this sort when the men that urge them refuse to turn down another street if they are warned that in the road they are going they will meet their death. As long as they admit that it is a wise and a kind thing to say to a man, "Do not go that way or your life will be endangered," I think we may listen to our Master saying to us, "Do not do this, or thou shalt perish." "Do this, that thou mayst enter into life."

And then, notice, the maimed man may enter into life, and the complete man may perish. The first may be a very poor creature, very ignorant, with a limited nature, undeveloped capacities, intellect and the like all but dormant in him, artistic sensibilities quite undeveloped, and he may have got hold of Jesus Christ and His love, and be trying to love and serve Him back again, and so be entering into life even here, and be sure of a life more perfect yonder. And the complete man, cultured all round, with all his faculties polished and exercised to the full, may have one side of his nature atrophied, that which connects him with God in Christ. And so he may be like some fair tree that stands out there in the open, on all sides extending its equal beauty, with its stem symmetrical, cylindrical, perfect in its green cloud of foliage, yet there may be a worm at the root of it, and it may be given up to rottenness and destruction. Cultivated men may perish, and uncultured men may have the life. The maimed man may touch Christ with his stump, and so receive life, and the complete man may lay hold

of the world and the flesh and the devil with his hands, and so share in their destruction.

Ay! and in that case the maimed man has the best of it. It is a very plain axiom of the rudest common-sense, this of my text: "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than to go into hell-fire with both thy hands." That is to say, better live maimed than die whole. A man comes into a hospital with gangrene in his leg; the doctor says it must come off; he says, "It shall not," and he is dead to-morrow. Who is the fool—the man that says, "Here, then, cut away; better life than limb," or the man that says, "I will keep it and I will die"?

"Better to enter into life maimed," because you will not always be maimed. The life will overcome the maiming. There is a wonderful restoration of capacities and powers that have been sacrificed for Christ's sake, a restoration even here. As crustaceans will develop a claw that they have thown off in their peril to save their lives, so we, if we have for Christ's sake maimed ourselves, will find in a large measure that the suppression will be recompensed even here on earth.

And hereafter, as the Rabbis used to say, "No man will rise from the grave a cripple." All the limitations which we have imposed upon ourselves, for Christ's sake, will be removed then. "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." "Verily I say unto thee, there is no man that hath left any" of his possessions, affections, tastes, capacities, "for My sake but he shall receive a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting." No man is a loser by giving up anything for Jesus Christ.

And, on the other hand, the complete man, complete in everything except his spiritual nature, is a fragment in all

his completeness; and yonder, there will for him be a solemn process of stripping. "Take it from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents." Ah! how much of that for which some of you are flinging away Jesus Christ will fade from you when you go yonder. "His glory shall not descend after Him;" "as He came, so shall He go." "Tongues, they shall cease; knowledge, it shall vanish away;" gifts shall fail, capacities shall disappear when the opportunities for the exercise of them in a material world are at an end, and there shall be little left to the man who *would* carry hands and feet and eyes all into the fire and forgot the one thing needful, but a thin thread, if I may so say, of personality quivering with the sense of responsibility, and preyed upon by the gnawing worm of a too-late remorse.

My brother! The lips of Incarnate Love spoke those solemn words of my text, which it becomes not me to repeat to you as if they were mine; but I ask you to weigh this, His urgent commandment, and to listen to His solemn assurance, by which He enforces the wisdom of the self-suppression:—"It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to be cast into hell-fire."

Give your hearts to Jesus Christ, and set following in His footsteps and keeping His commandments high above all other aims. You will have to suppress much and give up much, but such suppression is the shortest road to becoming perfect men, complete in Him, and such surrender is the surest way to possess all things. He that loseth his life—which is more than hand or eye—for Christ's sake, the same shall find it.

IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD STRAITENED?

SERMON XXV.

IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD STRAITENED?

"O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?"—MICAH ii. 7.

THE greater part of so-called Christendom is to-day* celebrating the gift of a Divine Spirit to the Church; but it may well be asked whether the religious condition of so-called Christendom is not a sad satire upon Pentecost. There seems a woful contrast, very perplexing to faith, between the bright promise at the beginning and the history of the development in the future. How few of those who share in to-day's services have any personal experience of such a gift! How many seem to think that that old story is only the record of a past event, a transient miracle which has no kind of relation to the experience of the Christians of this day! There were a handful of believers in one of the towns of Asia Minor, to whom an Apostle came, and was so startled at their condition that he put to them in wonder the question that might well be put to multitudes of so-called Christians amongst us: "Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?" And their answer is only too true a transcript of the experience of large masses of people who call themselves

* Whitsunday.

Christians: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

I desire, then, dear brethren, to avail myself of this day's associations in order to press upon your consciences and upon my own some considerations naturally suggested by them, and which find voice in these two indignant questions of the old prophet:—"Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" Are these—the phenomena of existing popular Christianity—"are these His doings!" And if we are brought sharp up against the consciousness of a dreadful contrast, it may do us good to ask what is the explanation of so cloudy a day following a morning so bright.

I.—First, then, I have to ask you to think with me of the promise of the Pentecost.

What did it declare and hold forth for the faith of the Church? I need not dwell at any length upon this point. The facts are familiar to you, and the inferences drawn from them are commonplace and known to us all. But let me just enumerate them as briefly as may be.

"Suddenly there came a sound, as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared cloven tongues as of fire, and sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

What lay in that? First, the promise of a Divine Spirit by symbols which express some, at all events, of the characteristics and wonderfulness of His work. The "rushing of a mighty wind" spoke of a power which varies in its manifestations from the gentlest breath that scarce moves the leaves on the summer trees to the wildest blast that casts down all which stands in its way.

The natural symbolism of the wind, to popular apprehension, the least material of all material forces, and of which the connection with the immaterial part of a man's

personality has been expressed in all languages, points to a Divine, to an immaterial, to a mighty, to a life-giving power which is free to blow whither it listeth, and of which men can mark the effects, though they are all ignorant of the force itself.

The twin symbol of the fiery tongues which parted and sat upon each of them speaks in like manner of the Divine influence, not as destructive, but full of quick, rejoicing energy and life, the power to transform and to purify. Whithersoever the fire comes, it changes all things into its own substance. Whithersoever the fire comes, there the ruddy spires shoot upwards towards the heavens. Whithersoever the fire comes, there all bonds and fetters are melted and consumed. And so this fire transforms, purifies, ennobles, quickens, sets free; and where the fiery spirit is, there is energy, swift life, rejoicing activity, transforming and transmuting power which changes the recipient of the flame into flame himself.

Then, still further, in the fact of Pentecost there is the promise of a Divine Spirit which is to influence all the moral side of humanity. This is the great and glorious distinction between the Christian doctrine of inspiration and all others which have, in heathen lands, partially reached similar conceptions—that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has laid emphasis upon the *Holy* Spirit, and has declared that holiness of heart is the touchstone and test of all claims of Divine inspiration. Gifts are much, graces are more. An inspiration which makes wise is to be coveted, an inspiration which makes holy is transcendently better. There we find the safeguard against all the fanaticisms which have sometimes invaded the Christian Church, namely, in the thought that the Spirit which dwells in men, and makes them free from the obligations of outward law and cold morality, is a Spirit that works a deeper holiness than law dreamed, and a more spon-

taneous and glad conformity to all things that are fair and good, than any legislation and outward commandment could ever enforce. The Spirit that came at Pentecost is not merely a Spirit of rushing might and of swift-flaming energy, but it is a Spirit of holiness, whose most blessed and intimate work is the production in us of all the homely virtues and sweet, unpretending goodnesses which can adorn and gladden humanity.

Still further, the Pentecost carried in it the promise and prophecy of a Spirit granted to all the Church. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." This is the true democracy of Christianity, that its very basis is laid in the thought that every member of the body is equally close to the Head, and equally recipient of the life. There are none now who have a Spirit which others do not possess. The ancient aspiration of the Jewish lawgiver: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them," is fulfilled in the experience of Pentecost; and the handmaiden and the children, as well as the old men and the servants, receive of that universal gift. Therefore sacerdotal claims, special functions, privileged classes, are alien to the spirit of Christianity, and blasphemies against the inspiring God. If "one is your master, all ye are brethren." And if we have all been made to drink into one Spirit, then no longer hath any man dominion over our faith nor power to intervene and to intercede with God for us.

And still further, the promise of the early history was that of a spirit which should fill the whole nature of the men to whom He was granted; filling, in the measure, of course, of their receptivity, filling them as the great sea does all the creeks and indentations along the shore. The deeper the creek, the deeper the water in it. The further inland it runs, the further will the refreshing tide pene-

trate the bosom of the continent. And so each man, according to his character, stature, circumstances, and all the varying conditions which determine his power of receptivity, will receive a varying measure of that gift. Yet it is meant that all shall be full. The little vessel, the tiny cup, as well as the great cistern and the enormous vat, each contains according to its capacity. And if all are filled, then this quick Spirit must have the power to influence all the provinces of human nature, must touch the moral, must touch the spiritual. The temporary manifestations and extraordinary signs of His power may well drop away as the flower drops when the fruit has set. The operations of the Divine Spirit are to be felt thrilling through all the nature, and every part of the man's being is to be recipient of the power. Just as when you take a candle and plunge it into a jar of oxygen it blazes up, so my poor human nature immersed in that Divine Spirit, baptised in the Holy Ghost, shall flame in all its parts into unsuspected and hitherto inexperienced brightness. Such are the elements of the promise of Pentecost.

II.—And now, in the next place, look at the apparent failure of the promise.

"Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" Look at Christendom. Look at all the churches. Look at yourselves. Will anyone say that the religious condition of any body of professed believers at this moment corresponds to Pentecost? Is not the gap so wide that to fill it up seems almost impossible? Is not the stained and imperfect fulfilment a miserable satire upon the promise? "If the Lord be with us," said one of the heroes of ancient Israel, "wherefore is all this come upon us?" And I am sure that we may say the same. If the Lord be with us, what is the meaning of the state of things which we see around us, and must recognise in ourselves? Do any existing churches present the final perfect form of Chris-

tianity as embodied in a society? Would not the best thing that could happen, and the thing that will have to happen some day, be the disintegration of the existing organisations in order to build up a more perfect habitation of God through the Spirit? I do not want to exaggerate. God knows there is no need for exaggerating. The plain, unvarnished story, without any pessimistic picking out of the black bits and forgetting all the light ones, is bad enough.

Take three points on which I do not dwell and apply them to yourselves, dear brethren, and estimate by them the condition of things around us. First, say whether the ordinary tenor of our own religious life looks as if we had that Divine Spirit in us which transforms everything into its own beauty, and makes men, through all the regions of their nature, holy and pure. Then ask yourselves the question whether the standard of devotion and consecration in any church witnesses of the presence of a Divine Spirit. A little handful of people, the best of them very partially touched with the life of God, and very imperfectly consecrated to His service, surrounded by a great mass about whom we can scarcely, in the judgment of charity, say even so much,—that is the description of most of our congregations. "Are these His doings?" Surely somebody else's than His.

Take another question. Do the relations of modern Christians and their churches to one another attest the presence of a unifying Spirit? "We have all been made to drink into one Spirit," said Paul. Alas! Alas, does it seem as if *we* had? Look round professing Christendom, look at the rivalries and the jealousies between two chapels in adjoining streets. Look at the gulfs between Christian men who differ only on some comparative trifle of organisation and polity, and say if such things correspond to the Pentecostal promise of one Spirit which is to make

all the members into one body ? "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened ? Are these *His* doings ?"

Take another branch of evidence. Look at the comparative impotence of the Church in its conflict with the growing worldliness of the world. I do not forget how much is being done all about us to-day, and how still Christ's Gospel is winning triumphs, but I do not suppose that any man can look thoughtfully and dispassionately on the condition, say, for instance, of Manchester, or of any of our great towns, and mark how the populace knows nothing and cares nothing about us and our Christianity, and never comes into our places of worship, and has no share in our hopes any more than if they lived in Central Africa, and that after eighteen hundred years of nominal Christianity, without feeling that some malign influence has arrested the leaping growth of the early Church, and that somehow or other that lava stream, if I might so call it, which poured hot from the heart of God in the old day has had its flow checked, and over its burning bed there has spread a black and wrinkled crust, whatsoever lingering heat there may still be at the centre. "If God be with us, why has all this come upon us ?"

III.—And now, lastly, let us think for a moment of the solution of the contradiction.

The indignant questions of my text may be taken, with a little possibly permissible violence, as expressing and dismissing some untrue explanations. One explanation that sometimes is urged is, the Spirit of the Lord *is* straitened. That explanation takes two forms. Sometimes you hear people saying, "Christianity is effete. We have to go now to fresh fountains of inspiration, and turn away from these broken cisterns that can hold no water." I am not going to argue that question. I do not think for my part that Christianity will be effete until the world has got up to it and beyond it in its practice, and it will

be a good while before that happens. Christianity will not be worn out until men have copied and reduced to practice the example of Jesus Christ, and they have not quite got that length yet. No shadow of a fear that the Gospel has lost its power, or that God's Spirit has become weak, should be permitted to creep over our hearts. The promise is, "I will send another Comforter, and He shall abide with you *for ever*." It is a permanent gift that was given to the Church on that day. We have to distinguish in the story between the symbols, the gift, and the consequences of the gift. The first and the last are transient, the second is permanent. The symbols were transient. The people that gathered together saw no tongues of fire. The consequences were transient. The tongues and the miraculous utterances were but for a time. The results vary according to the circumstances; but the central thing, the gift itself, is an irrevocable gift, and once bestowed is ever with the Church to all generations.

Another form of the explanation is the theory that God in His sovereignty is pleased to withhold his Spirit for reasons which we cannot trace. But it is not true that the gift once given varies in the degree in which it is continued. There is always the same flow from God. There are ebbs and flows in the spiritual power of the Church. Yes! And the tide runs out of your harbours. Is there any less water in the sea because it does? So the gift may ebb away from a man, from a community, from an epoch, not because God's manifestation and bestowment fluctuates, but because our receptivity changes. So we dismiss, and are bound to dismiss, if we are Christians, the unbelieving explanation, "The Spirit of the Lord *is* straitened," and not to sit with our hands folded, as if an inscrutable sovereignty, with which we have nothing to do, sometimes sent more and sometimes less of His spiritual gifts upon a waiting Church.

It is not so. "With Him is no variableness." The gifts of God are without repentance; and the Spirit that was given once, according to the Master's own word already quoted, is given that He may abide with us for ever.

Therefore we have to come back to this, which is the point to which I seek to bring you and myself, in lowly penitence and contrite acknowledgment—that it is all our own fault and the result of evil in ourselves that may be remedied, that we have so little of that Divine gift; and that if the churches of this country and of this day seem to be cursed and blasted in so much of their fruitless operations and formal worship, it is the fault of the churches, and not of the Lord of the churches. The stream that poured forth from the throne of God has not lost itself in the sands, nor is it shrunken in its volume. The fire that was kindled on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes. The rushing of the mighty wind that woke on that morning has not calmed and stilled itself into the stagnancy and suffocating breathlessness of mid-day heat. The same fulness of the Spirit which filled the believers on that day is available for us all. If, like that waiting Church of old, we abide in prayer and supplication, the gift will be given to us too, and we may repeat and reproduce, if not the miracles which we do not need, yet the necessary inspiration of the highest and the noblest days and saints in the history of the Church. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" "Ask and ye shall receive," and be filled with the Holy Ghost and with power.

HEROD—A STARTLED CONSCIENCE.

SERMON XXVI.

HEROD—A STARTLED CONSCIENCE.

"But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."—MARK vi. 16.

THE character of this Herod, surnamed Antipas, is a sufficiently common and a sufficiently despicable one. He was the very type of an Egyptian despot, exactly like some of those half-independent rajahs whose dominions march with ours in India; capricious, crafty, as the epithet which Christ applied to him, "That fox!" shows; cruel, as the story of the murder of John the Baptist proves; sensuous and lustful; and withal weak of fibre and infirm of purpose. He, Herodias, and John the Baptist make a triad singularly like the other triad in the Old Testament of Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah. In both cases we have the weak ruler, the beautiful she-devil at his side, inspiring him for all evil, and the stern prophet, the rebuker and the incarnate conscience for them both.

The words that I have read are the terrified exclamation of this weak and wicked man when he was brought in contact with the light and beauty of Jesus Christ. And if we think Who it was that frightened him, and ponder the words in which his fear expressed itself, we get, as it seems to me, some lessons worth the drawing.

I.—You have here the voice of a startled conscience.

Herod killed John without much sense of doing wrong. He was sorry, no doubt, for he had a kind of respect for the man, and he was reluctant to put him to death. But though there was reluctance, there was no hesitation. His fantastic sense of honour came in the way. In the one scale there was the life of a poor enthusiast, who had amused him for a while, but of whom he had got tired. In the other scale there were his word, the pleasure of Herodias, and the applause of the half-drunken boon companions that were sitting with them at the table. So, of course, the prophet was slain, and the pale head brought in to that wild revel; and except for the malignant gloating of the woman over her gratified revenge, the event, no doubt, very quickly passed from the memories of all concerned.

But then there came stealing into the silken seclusion of the palace, where he was wallowing in his sensuality like a hog in the sty, the tidings of another peasant Teacher that had risen up among the people. Christ's name had been ringing through the land, and been sounded with blessings in poor men's huts long before it got within the gates of Herod's palace. That is the place where religious earnestness makes its mark last of all. But it finally ran hither also; and light gossip went round concerning this new sensation. "Who is He? Who is He?" Each man had his own theory about Him, but a sudden memory started up in the frivolous despot's soul, and it was with a trembling heart that he said to himself, "I know! I know! It is John whom I beheaded! He is risen from the dead!" His conscience and his memory and his fears all awoke.

Now my friends, I pray you to lay that simple lesson to heart. We all of us do evil things with regard to which it is not so hard for us to bribe or to silence our memories

and our consciences. The hurry and bustle of daily life, the very weakness of our characters, the rush of sensuous delights, may make us blind and deaf to the voice of conscience; and we think that all chance of the evil deed rising again to harm us is past. But some trifle touches the hidden spring by mere accident; as in the old story of the man groping along a wall, till his finger happens to fall upon one inch of it, and immediately the concealed door flies open and there is the skeleton. So with us, some merely fortuitous association may freshen faded memories and wake a dormant conscience. An apparently trivial circumstance, like some hooked pole pushed at random into the sea, may bring up by the locks some pale and drowned memory long plunged in an ocean of oblivion. Here, in Herod's case, a report reaches him of a new Rabbi who bears but a very faint resemblance to John, and that is enough to bring his crime back in its naked atrocity.

My friends! We have all got these hybernating serpents in our consciences, and nobody knows when the needful warmth may come that will wake them and make them lift their forked heads to sting. The whole landscape of my past life lies there behind the mists of apparent forgetfulness, and any light air of suggestion may sweep away the clouds, and show it all. What have you laid up in these memories of yours, to start into life some day: "at the last biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder"? "It is John! It is John whom I beheaded!"

Take this other thought, how, as this story shows us, when once at the bidding of memory conscience begins to work, all illusions as to the nature of my action, and as to my share in it, are swept away.

When the evil deed was done, Herod scarcely felt as if *he* did it. There was his plighted oath, there was Herodias's pressure, there was the excitement of the

moment. He seemed forced to do it, and scarcely responsible for doing it. And no doubt, if he ever thought about it after, he shuffled off a large percentage of the responsibility of the guilt upon the shoulders of the others. But when,

"In the silent sessions of things past,"

the image and remembrance of the deed come up to him, all the helpers and tempters have disappeared, and "It is John whom *I* beheaded!" (There is an emphasis in the Greek upon the "I"). "Yes, it was *I*." "Herodias tempted me; Herodias's daughter titillated my lust; I fancied that my oath bound me; I could not help doing what would please those who sat at the table. I said all that before I did it. But now, when it is done, they have all disappeared, every one of them to his quarter; and I and the ugly thing are left together alone. It was I that did it, and nobody besides."

The blackness of the crime, too, presents itself to the startled conscience as it did not in the doing. There are many euphemisms and soft words in which, as in cotton-wool, we wrap our evil deeds and so deceive ourselves as to their hardness and their edge; but when conscience gets hold of them, and they pass out of the realm of fact into the mystical region of remembrance, all the wrappages, and all the apologies, and all the soft phrases drop away; and the ugliest, briefest, plainest word is the one by which my conscience describes my own evil. "*I* beheaded him! *I*, and none else, was the murderer." Oh! dear brethren, do you see to it that what you store up in these caves and treasure-cellars of memory which we all carry with us, are deeds that will bear being brought out again and looked at in the pure white light of conscience, and which you will neither be ashamed nor afraid to lay your hand upon and say: "It is mine; *I* planted and sowed and worked it, and I am ready to reap the fruit."

"If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself, if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it. Take care of the storehouses of memory and of conscience, and mind what kind of things you lay up there.

II.—Now, once more, I take these words as setting before us an example of a conscience awakened to the unseen world.

Many commentators tell us that this Herod was a Sadducee; that is to say theologically, and theoretically he had given up the belief in a future state and in spiritual existence. I do not know that that can be sustained, but much more probably he was only a Sadducee in the way in which a great many of us are Sadducees: he never thought about these things, he did not think about them enough to know whether he believed in them or not. He was a practical, if not a theoretical Sadducee; that is to say, this present was his world, and as for the future, it did not come much into his mind. But, now notice when conscience begins to stir it at once sends his thoughts into that unseen world beyond.

There is a very close connection, as all history proves, between theoretical disbelief in a future life and in spiritual existence, and superstition. So strong is the bond which unites men with the unseen world, that if they do not link themselves with that world in the legitimate and true fashion, it is almost certain to avenge itself upon them by leading them to all manner of low and abject superstitions. Spiritualism is the disease of a generation that disbelieves in another life. The French Revolution, with its infidelities, was also the age of quacks and impostors such as Cagliostro and the like. The time when Christ lived presented precisely the same phenomena. If Herod was a Sadducee, Herod's Sadduceeism, like frost upon the window-panes, was such a thin layer shutting out the invisible world, that the least warmth of conscience

melted it, and the clear daylight glared in upon him. And I am afraid that there are a great many of us who may be half-inclined to reject the belief in another life, who would find precisely the same thing happening to us.

But be that as it may, it seems to me that whenever a man comes to think very seriously about his conduct as being wrong in the sight of God, there at once starts up before him the thought of a future life and a judgment-bar. And I want to know why and how it is that the vigorous operation of conscience is always accompanied with a "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." I think it is worth your while to reflect upon the fact, and to try and ascertain for yourselves the reason of it, that whenever a man's conscience begins to tell him of his wrong, its message is not only of transgressions but of judgment, and that beyond the grave.

And, moreover, notice here how the startled conscience, when it becomes aware of an unseen world beyond the grave, cannot but think that out of that world there shall come evil for it. These words of my text are obviously the words of a frightened man. It was terror that made Herod say: "It is John whom I beheaded. He has arisen from the dead!" Who was it that frightened Herod? It was He Who came from the bosom of the Father, with His hands full of blessings and His heart full of love: Who came to quiet all fears, and to cleanse all consciences, and to satisfy all men's souls with His own sweet love and His perfect righteousness. And it was this genial and gracious and Divine form, with all its actualities of gentleness and its possibilities of grace, which the evil conscience of the terrified tetrarch converted into a messenger of judgment come from the tomb to rebuke and to smite him for his evils.

That is to say, always men may make that future life

and their relation to it what they will. Either the Heavens may pour down their dewy influences of benediction and fruitfulness upon them, or they may pour down fire and brimstone upon their spirits. Men have the choice which it shall be. The evil conscience drapes the future in darkness, and is right in doing it. The evil conscience forebodes chastisement, judgment, condemnation coming to it from out of the unseen world, and it is right in doing it, with limitations. You can make Christ Himself the Messenger of condemnation and of death to you. My dear friends, do you choose whether, fronting eternity with an unforgiven burden of sin upon your shoulders and a conscience unsprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ, you make of it one great fear; or whether you make it what it really is, a lustrous hope, a perfect joy. Is the Messenger that comes out of the unseen to come to you as a Judge of your buried evils started into life, or is He to come to you as the Christ that bears in His hand the price of your redemption, and with His blood sprinkles your conscience from dead works and from all its terrors?

III.—And now, lastly, I see in this saying an illustration of a conscience which, partially stirred, soon went finally to sleep again.

Strangely enough, if we pursue the story, this very terror and clear-eyed perception of the nature of his action led the frivolous king to nothing more than a curious wish to see this new Teacher. It was not gratified; and thus by degrees he got to hate Him and to want to kill Him. And then, last of all, on the eve of the Crucifixion Jesus was brought into his presence, and Herod was glad that his curiosity was satisfied at last. His conscience lay perfectly still. There was no trace of the old convictions or of the old tremor. He questioned Jesus many things, and Christ answered him nothing, because He knew it

was of no use to speak to him. So Herod and his men of war mocked Him and set Him at nought; and sent Him back to Pilate; and he let his last chance of salvation go, and never knew what he had done.

Well, there is a lesson for us all. Do not tamper with partially awakened consciences; do not rest satisfied till they are quieted in the legitimate way. There was a man who trembled when he heard Paul remonstrating with him "about righteousness and temperance"—both of which the unjust judge had set at nought—"and judgment to come." And he sent for him often and communed with him gladly, but we never hear that Felix trembled any more. It is possible for you so to lull yourselves into indifference, and, as it were, so to waterproof your consciences that appeals, threatenings, pleadings, mercies, the words of men, the Gospel of God, and the beseechings of Christ Himself may all run off them and leave them dry and hard.

One very potent means of rendering consciences insensible is to neglect their voice. The convictions which you have not followed out, like the ruins of a bastion shattered by shell, protect your remaining fortifications against the impact of God's truth. I believe that there is no man, woman, or child listening to me at this moment but has had, some time or other in the course of his or her life, convictions which only needed to be followed out; gleams of guidance which only required to be faithfully pursued, to bring him or her into loving fellowship with, and true faith in, Jesus Christ. But some of you have neglected them; some of you have choked them with cares and studies and occupations of different kinds; and you are driving on to this result,—I do not know that it is ever reached in this life, but a man may come indefinitely near it,—that you shall stand, like Herod, face to face with Jesus Christ and feel nothing, and that all

His love and grace shall be offered, and not excite the faintest stirring in your hearts of a desire to accept it.

Oh, my friend, we have all of us evils enough in these charnel-houses of our memory to make us dread the awakening of conscience, to make us look with fear and apprehension beyond the veil to a judgment-seat. And, blessed be God, we have all of us had, and some of us have now, drawings to which we need but to yield ourselves in order to find that He Who comes from the Heavens is no John whom we beheaded, risen for judgment, but a Mightier than he, that Son of God Who came, "not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

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